



Hunting Reflections~~~~~

by

CAPT. J. OTHO PAGET.



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By
CAPT. J. OTHO PAGET.



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Foreword

These short chapters on some phases of hunting are a reprint of articles written for "Game and Gun." Having been written at intervals, and without any idea of subsequent collection in book form, must be their excuse for their lack of continuity.

This does not pretend to be anything like a complete manual of the sport and are merely reflections that occurred to me at the time. Although meant chiefly as a little assistance to beginners at the game, experts might find some of the ideas worth their consideration. Hunting is an absorbing subject and the last word on it will never be written, so that even this modest contribution may provide something for discussion. When two or three enthusiasts are gathered together many pleasant hours can be spent in exchanging ideas on hounds and hunting.

Foxhunting is the main theme in these pages, but an article "The Beagle and the Hare" was written at the same period, and has therefore been included. However, very many of the most successful amateur foxhound huntsmen have graduated with beagles, and this may not be out of place.

THE AUTHOR.



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ERRATA

Page 36, line 20, for "up-wind" read "down-wind."

Page 52, line 29, for "rights" read "lights."

Page 90, line 25, for "walking" read "warning."

Page 92, line 12, for "means" read "smeuses."

Page 139, line 22, for "dosed" read "dressed."

HUNTING.

CHAPTER ONE.

IN addition to coining new words our American friends have a habit of using certain terms and expressions in a sense entirely different from their meaning to us on this side of the water. Some changes may not appeal to our insular conservatism, but personally I consider the Americans' wider interpretation of " hunting " to be a very great improvement on the restricted manner in which we apply it. Hunting is a noun born of a verb, and as such we have grown accustomed to using it solely in describing the methods of hounds following a scent. The English dictionary certainly does not take this narrow view in its definition, which we read as " the act or practice of pursuing wild animals for catching or killing them."

In America the man who goes forth to the chase with hounds only, and he who depends on his gun for sport, bear equally the title of hunter. This seems to me the correct and sportsmanlike way of looking at it.

One man relies on the instincts of his hounds to follow the hunted animal to its death, whilst the other depends solely on his own woodcraft to find the game, and his skill in shooting to compass its end. The kill is, of course, the crowning achievement of every chase, but there is little satisfaction in attaining that end unless the hunt leading up to it has been good.

Before the era of the breech-loader the shooter's happiest moments were in looking for or hunting for his game, so that an easily found and acquired heavy bag was less valued than a light one that had taken him all his skill to obtain.

Modern and artificial conditions have probably robbed the sportsman to-day of the glamour our forefathers enjoyed in shooting. The excitement of finding the game, except on rough shoots, is now practically a thing of the past, and thus the truest form of the sport is lost. This does not mean that the average shooting man is any worse sportsman than his predecessors, but instead of deriving his chief pleasure from hunting for his game, he now has to depend on his skill in straight and clean shooting to satisfy his sporting instincts. To accomplish successfully difficult shots, and to drop his birds stone dead, is at the present day the highest ideal of the shooter. The mere act of killing does not appeal to the experienced shot and must eventually satiate the appetite of the most bloodthirsty.

The head-keeper who by his knowledge of woodcraft is able to engineer a drive or beat so that the birds are brought to the desired points, must enjoy better sport and greater satisfaction than those who do the actual killing. In the same way a stalker has the

advantage of the man who holds the rifle. To get within range of the wild stag on his native mountain may mean several hours of strenuous walking, but it is the ability of the guide in the choice of ground, method of approach, and judgment of how local contours will affect the wind, that the rifleman must depend on to secure the desired shot. The expert stalker may feel a momentary pang of disappointment when after the exercise of all his skill he brings the stalk to a successful climax and the man with the rifle then misses an easy shot, but he will still have the satisfaction of knowing that he himself has scored a triumph over the wild.

The love of sport was engrafted in us by nature for our mental and physical well-being—that is, to give an absorbing recreation as a relief from life's stern duties, and at the same time encourage the desire for hard exercise, without which there can be neither bodily fitness nor good health. Nowadays, in pursuance of the sport we love there is a tendency to forget that nature meant we should enjoy it, only after hard work and stubborn endurance. The smooth and easy way, the desire for comfort and luxury, the warmth and soft side of life, they all make a natural appeal to the sybarite within us. We do not realise that by thus indulging the appetite for luxury, much of the pleasure we strive to attain is withheld.

Riding to hounds six days or even four days a week must always be strenuous exercise and will keep followers of the sport from becoming flabby in either mind or muscle, but motor-cars have latterly considerably modified the severity of a fox-hunter's exertions. At the close of last century everyone would cheerfully accept the thought of a fifteen or

twenty mile ride home after a good run, but in these times such a sequel to a day's hunting would be very unwelcome to the majority of young men.

The substitution of "driving" for the old method of "walking up" may have resulted in a great improvement in actual shooting skill, but the walk from one stand to another is after all only fit exercise for the old and infirm. The idea to-day seems to be to get a maximum bag at the expense of the minimum exertion and fatigue.

Although the fact is not appreciated, severe exercise does undoubtedly increase the pleasure of all sport, and the popularity of stalking is sufficient proof. Although it is a sport confined chiefly to rich men, their riches do not smooth the road to success, and it is only at the expense of many hours' arduous toil they can hope to attain a stag. The big game hunter is another instance of the man who relies for the greater part on his search for the game to afford him the finest thrills. The hard work, discomfort and dangers attendant thereon only help to increase his keenness, and no heads or skins are valued unless they have been difficult to procure. Unless it may be the urgent necessity of getting fresh meat, no man who at considerable expense visits the wilder parts of Africa takes any pleasure in that which is easy to find and as easy to kill.

The American application of the word "hunting" to the use of either gun or hound by which I began this article has led me away into other channels which it is not my intention further to explore. My idea was to emphasise the necessity for a mutual sympathy between hunting and shooting men. The principal goal of the best exponents in both sports is the same,

and it is only their methods that differ. Between the man who only hunts and he who only shoots relations are, I fear, sometimes strained. If they would both try to remember the old adage: "Do unto others as they should do unto us," and be occasionally ready to sacrifice their own pleasure for the brotherhood of sport, the little bickerings would cease and we should become again a happy family. The man of leisure and with no duties to occupy his mind, whether he be a follower of hounds or gun, is liable to develop a selfishness and want of consideration for others which is more or less responsible for the friction occurring at intervals. Most men who undertake the mastership of foxhounds develop a keen sense of their responsibilities and are always considerate of the sporting man's interests, but the efforts of a master to promote good feeling are often marred by some thoughtless member of his field, either by word or deed. No master would ever think of drawing a covert that the owner or tenant was intending to shoot within the next day or two. This, however, cannot be avoided unless friendly relations are established between them, so that they can make their arrangements to interfere as little as possible with each other's sport.

A good run with a straight-necked fox may sometimes upset a master's calculations and lead hounds into coverts he wished to avoid. A letter of apology for the disturbance would follow, and the owner of the shoot, if a good sportsman, would accept the explanation in the spirit it was offered, realising that it would be against the traditions of hunting to stop hounds in the middle of a great run.

The owner of a shoot who forbids hounds to enter his coverts at any time or season, loses much of the

good-fellowship that should exist between the two sports, a loss that a few extra head of game cannot make good.

Foxes have earned a reputation for killing game which they do not always deserve. If gamekeepers and their employers would more often balance the good a fox does against his crimes, they would look more leniently on him. A vixen with cubs, whose mate has been killed, has little time to hunt for her food and may take the nearest she can get. Keepers know as well as I can tell them, and for which they have ample proof in their billets, that a wild fox's food does not consist wholly of either fur or feather. Rats, mice and beetles are the outstanding ingredients of Reynard's evening meal. It is in his search for the succulent rat round pheasant pens that he often incurs the fears and animosity of the rearer. All those with much experience of rearing pheasants have had trouble with rats, and though rats may be attracted by the food in the first place, they are not averse to killing the younger birds; while their egg-destroying propensities need no emphasis.

When the employer insists on having both foxes and pheasants in his coverts, some keepers make use of a method which is as bad for their eventual interests as it is for hunting. The method is to enclose the vixen and cubs within a wire pen until the pheasants can roost safely in the trees. The vixen thus acquires the fatal habit of getting her food without hunting for it, and is also unable to instruct her family in the art. The result is, both mother and children, when given their liberty, prowl round the neighbourhood of their late prison, killing and eating that which is close at hand. Foxes thus brought up in this un-

natural state are useless for hunting, and, should any survive hounds' first visit, will kill more fowls and pheasants than ten litters of wild animals. It should be remembered that the wild fox seldom hunts for food anywhere near his kennel, and nearly always wanders far afield in search of a night's supper.

The war seems to have bred a spirit of sport amongst those with no inclination that way before, and the result is we have numerous recruits to hunting, who had little opportunity to acquire knowledge in boyhood. The more the merrier! They would, however, do well to learn the rudiments of venery ere they launch forth in pursuit. By this means they would be enabled to appreciate and understand the finer points which otherwise would be lost to them.

Here let me reiterate what I have already written, that the full enjoyment of any sport must entail the capacity to endure discomforts and hard work. There are, I regret to say, a number of people each winter who fly to warmer climes, thereby sacrificing the hardy element in their northern blood to the soft, sensuous luxuries of the south.

CHAPTER TWO.

THE FOXHOUND.

THERE are and always will be certain people of the old school who insist that nothing has improved and everything was better in days gone by. From sportsmen of this class it is only natural to hear the verdict that hounds have not the hunting qualities they formerly possessed, and that most present day packs are unable to follow a cold scent. Without in the least agreeing to this sweeping assertion, I think the moment has arrived when it is up to hound breeders of the present day to find out if there is even a grain of truth in the indictment. The hound with his exceptional hunting powers is a legacy we have inherited, and it behoves us to bequeath to posterity an animal every bit as good, or perhaps better, than the one handed down to us. The emulation amongst hound breeders to achieve success at Peterborough may have in some cases led individuals to depart from the time honoured rule of only breeding from hounds of exceptional merit in the field. Of course, we all know

that winning a prize in the show ring is no test of ability to hunt, and the ribbon is awarded solely for conformation. What constitutes the proper conformation of a hound, which much possess speed, stamina and constitution to enable him to do his work with the least exertion to himself, is not easy to define. There are many excellent judges with a natural eye for a hound, but there are others equally painstaking, who have not the gift. The novice, however, who has spent half-a-dozen mornings in the kennel has no difficulty in deciding whether a hound is straight or otherwise: the result being that this one point has been seized upon as essential above all others.

I do not wish to minimise the importance of a straight leg, and there is no doubt the continual use of sires without that qualification would eventually produce a race of animals as crooked as bassetts. The straight leg undoubtedly adds to the beauty of outline, but it has less influence on a hound's powers of endurance and speed than either shoulders, ribs, or thighs. Also a hound that can stand straight on the flags may not be able to walk straight, when he will show a tendency either to be tied in or out at elbows both faults difficult to detect in a limited space. Whilst on the subject of straight legs—the fore only—it will be as well to discuss their merits in enabling a hound to stand hard work. When going full speed, *ventre a terre*, it has been suggested that the straight leg throws the whole shock on the shoulders, and it should be remembered that the greater the pace a hound is going the harder he will hit the ground. The knee that does not carry straight down to the toe and bends slightly backwards, we have always

considered a sign of weakness, but that failing very rarely results in a breakdown, whereas in the perfect leg "toes down" are not uncommon, and I have heard huntsman complain of shaken shoulders when the ground has been extra hard in cub-hunting. Would those shoulders have been injured had the knee been slightly bent, and does that eye-sore relieve somewhat the jar, like a horse's fetlock? These are questions worth our consideration. The modern fox-hound is a thing of beauty, a combination of quality with strength, which it would be very hard to improve on, and it would be hazardous to try experiments with blood that had no lineage to back it.

Belvoir has always been renowned for legs, and anything diverging a hair's breadth from the plumb was ruthlessly drafted; but with numerous litters bred and almost unlimited walks the kennel had greater opportunities than others. In spite of this fastidiousness in the minor details and straightness and colour, no hound was ever bred from at Belvoir that showed the slightest fault or was not perfect in its work. The result of this was that every kennel in the kingdom has drawn on this well-known pack for sires to improve their hounds.

Although Belvoir has done great good in spreading its shining qualities over a wide sphere, it has perhaps done harm in another way, inasmuch as it set a fashion which smaller kennels tried to imitate. The straight leg and the Belvoir tan were the external attributes of the famous pack. These were seized upon by lesser lights as ideals for which they had to breed, forgetting that however perfect in legs and colour, no hound was allowed to reproduce itself at Belvoir unless faultless in work.

Now I have no knowledge of any master or huntsman having erred in forgiving a hound lack of hunting abilities on account of good looks, but I have a strong suspicion that it may have occasionally happened in small kennels. It is easy to understand when a moderate-looking pack breeds a hound that would not be out of place at Peterborough, there is a strong temptation to be lenient in criticising his performance in the field. The huntsman almost unconsciously is apt to follow the advice often given to a wife on taking unto herself a husband, "Be to his virtues ever kind, and to his faults a little blind." The argument I have frequently heard expressed is that even if a hound does not display marked ability in hunting, he may safely be used as a sire if his breeding is right. The weak point in this argument is that although even great grand sires and great grand dams on both sides may have enjoyed stainless reputations the individual is liable to inherit some weakness from a more remote ancestor. If then he is bred from, he is quite likely to transmit the failing to his progeny.

In the days when foxhounds were not as numerous as now, there would certainly be some with a leaven of sin in their composition, and it is that faint trace handed down through perhaps a hundred generations which is liable to reappear again.

Breeding from a hound with some imperfection, throwing back to an ancestor in the far distant past, would be risking the re-incarnation of a fault, almost blotted out by repeated infusions of honest blood.

Everyone has the right to indulge his taste or fancy about the minor points of a hound and to breed an animal along the lines which please his eye. I do, however, dispute the right of anyone calling himself a sportsman to allow his taste for appearance

to make him neglect the essential qualities of a hound he may desire to perpetuate. Such a crime is an insult to past generations and a felony on those unborn.

In referring to the Belvoir I am not doing it in a spirit of criticism, having always been a consistent admirer of the pack. You will look in vain through the whole kennel for a leg that is not plumb straight, and the beautiful tan colour is a delight to the eye. Style, quality, and strength are there in perfection. Owing to the number of puppies bred, the Dukes of Rutland could afford to indulge a harmless fancy for colour or straight legs without loss of hunting qualities. History, however, relates that Belvoir once drafted, for not being quite straight, a hound destined to acquire great fame and to live again in later years through the reputation of his children's children. This was Mr. Osbaldestone's Furrier, a descendant of Mr. Meynell's Stormer. Some twenty years later Belvoir acquired Rallywood from the Brocklesby, and this hound was more or less responsible for the pack's distinction in the latter half of the last century. Rallywood being a descendant in the male line of Furrier, Belvoir was thus able to make a solid foundation on the stone they had previously rejected.

Leaving the straight leg as considered necessary for the true conformation of a hound in his work, and therefore requiring no further argument, I come to the absurd craze for the Belvoir tan colour which has done great harm. The old saying that "a good horse is never a bad colour" is equally applicable to a hound. The desire of a master or a huntsman to have his pack match in size and colour is a laudable ambition, but it must be a great waste of good material to discard the best hunters because their

colour does not please the eye. We are all rather prone to this sort of "eye-wash," and the pack that appears level at the meet cannot really enjoy that distinction unless it possess neither "head" nor "tail" in running. In discussing the colour question, size may seem a side issue, and my only reason for introducing it here is because in speaking of an evenly-matched pack both size and colour are meant. A pack of this description is very attractive, particularly when there is a general similarity of type and expression. It may be a pleasing sight on the flags or at a meet, but according to my ideas it cannot be called level unless the proverbial sheet covers it in running.

In Cecil's *Hunting Tours*, published in 1863, I notice there was at that date a leaning towards the Belvoir tan and the gradual elimination of the lighter colours has been going on ever since. Probably the reason this tendency has taken such a long time to reach its present state is that huntsmen were loth to part with their best working hounds, which very frequently were either badger or lemon pied. There is no doubt in my mind that certain characteristics are the inseparable attributes of colour, derived probably from some ancestor in the distant past. When, therefore, we see hounds of a particular colour are almost invariably extra good in their work, it must be foolish to discard them because they do not please the eye. The Berkeley retained the light colours longer than any other pack of repute, and enjoyed a great reputation for its performances in the field. Amongst other good qualities it was renowned for "tongue," a very important attribute of a hound, and in which many present-day packs are lamentably

lacking. Some years ago, in discussing with a huntsman where to go for a change of blood, I suggested the Berkeley, and though he at once admitted its good qualities, he replied, "I am afraid of getting that light colour in the kennel." This, I fear, has been the general sentiment.

Referring again to *Hunting Tours*, in speaking of the Berkeley "Cecil" says: "I have for many years expressed my allegiance to that blood, and every day's experience confirms me in the opinion that for general purposes of utility, in countries where a combination of those qualities have to a certain degree been overlooked, there are no hounds to surpass them." By "general purposes of utility" I presume the writer meant hounds that excelled in the field and could catch their foxes, which is, after all, the sort we want now. In 1863 I think the badger pie would be the prevailing colour in the Berkeley kennels.

In spite of the determined efforts to stamp out the old light colour, it occasionally crops up, and when it does appear I hope some lover of the foxhound will cherish it.

Peterborough has, I venture to think, made a mistake in encouraging the taste for the very big hound. It is quite true that sires with size and substance must be used, or otherwise the breed might degenerate into weeds, but there is a happy medium. Opinions have always varied as to what is the most useful size for a foxhound, but personally I think dogs of twenty-three inches and bitches of twenty-two are big enough for all practical purposes. We have it on record that "Mr. Meynell's taste led him to admire large hounds, but his experience convinced

him that small ones were generally the stoutest, soundest, and in every respect the most executive." As Mr. Meynell hunted the Quorn country for close on fifty years, he had ample time to arrive at this conclusion. In those days the country was not as enclosed as it is now, and a big hound would have a better chance, so that there is every reason why we should be content with medium-sized hounds at present. Again quoting "Cecil," "It is now very generally acknowledged that hounds of a medium stature are to be preferred to over-sized ones, most especially in a hilly and woodland country." Further on he alludes to the same subject and says: "Medium-sized hounds, provided they possess muscular powers with good legs and feet, possess so very many advantages over their gigantic brethren that it is difficult to imagine what can induce any man of practical experience and observation to patronise them." "Cecil" was continually visiting different packs and had exceptional opportunities of forming a just opinion. He is one of the very few writers of the past to whom we can refer to for information about hounds, the majority confining their remarks to the exploits of riders.

We may take it that Brocklesby Rallywood, sire of the well-known Belvoir hound of that name, was of the small and active sort, at least judging from Will Goodalls' description. He says: "This is a most beautiful little short-legged dog, exceedingly light of bone, but with beautiful legs and feet."

A writer of later date, Mr. Clapham, says: "As to size, a hound of twenty-three inches or under is in nine cases out of ten a much better performer than one of twenty-four or five inches." He again refers

to size in the ability to jump fences, and remarks: "We can say without the least hesitation that a small, compactly built hound will invariably beat a big, lengthy hound when it comes to negotiating all sorts of fences." This writer has evidently studied the subject very thoroughly, and as much of his experience appears to have been gained on the Fells, where, with no fences to stop them, it might be thought the big hounds would score, we would do well to heed his advocacy of the small, compact sort.

Mr. Clapham, in his book, *Foxes, Foxhounds, and Foxhunting*, definitely condemns the modern foxhound which appeals to Peterborough judges, and states that the animal finding favour there is not built on the lines to stand a really hard day's work, or at least will not last them many seasons.

I think all who have the interest of the foxhound at heart should read and ponder over the conclusions this author arrives at. Although agreeing with much he has written, and recognising the powers of observation that have enabled him to write the book, I cannot agree with him entirely.

What experience Mr. Clapham may have had in the grass countries of the Midlands I do not know, but imagine it must have been slight. When he speaks of modern foxhounds that have been taken to the Fells, he says they have compared very badly, both for nose and pace, with the local hounds. What these particular animals were like, or where they hailed from, he does not state, but as the Fell sportsmen are not naturally overburdened with money, they would hardly be prepared to pay big prices. It is not likely the master of a fashionable pack would

give away his best hounds, and these individuals that have disgraced their ancestry were probably drafted as useless.

I have had no experience of fell hunting, but it seems to me that with the majority of the field following on foot, hounds have a much better chance than in a grass country, where a crowd of horsemen are continually pressing. In the former case, also, the ground is less foiled and there are fewer extraneous smells to spoil scent. The best grazing grounds of Quorn, Belvoir, or Cottesmore will often contain four and five sheep to the acre, besides other stock, whereas on moor and mountain I presume one sheep to ten acres would be nearer the mark, though the greater part of the hunting season there are no sheep at all on the high ground. I can quite believe that the Fell hounds, having been bred entirely for their abilities to hunt foxes, without any fancy for shape or colour, are reliable for that purpose, but doubt very much if their ancestry is as good as the packs Mr. Clapham condemns. The blood of the latter was selected in the first instance from the best sources England could produce, and though some latter-day breeders may have for the time effaced its good qualities, judicious selection will bring it again to the surface.

Colonel Curre has worked hard for the last thirty years in incorporating the best elements of English and Welsh blood. The fact that he has got together now a very killing pack of hounds with nose, drive, and tongue, should mean that he has attained success. Unless I am very much mistaken, however, he finds great difficulty in fixing a type, and the results of mixing two different strains of blood is not

always satisfactory. When I had the pleasure of seeing his pack, what struck me most was the general excellence of shoulders, and if Colonel Curre continues to keep that essential point as a guiding star for the next ten years he will, I think, definitely establish a breed.

Colonel Curre began his labours because he was dissatisfied with many of the English hounds' work in the field and disagreed with the fancy points that gained favour at Peterborough. Introducing new strains into old-established blood is always a hazardous proceeding and may result in bringing out the worst qualities of both. I should therefore advise anyone desirous of improving his pack to select descendants of well-known English ancestors and breed only from those inheriting their best hunting qualities. Let him forget for a few years all about feet and legs, confining his attention in conformation chiefly to shoulders, ribs, and thighs but above all remembering that all these things are worthless unless the balance is true. I feel convinced that the sterling qualities possessed by hounds of the early nineteenth century are only dormant and that careful breeding would restore them to their original pristine strength.

Foxhound breeders of to-day must realise from Mr. Clapham's indictment and from Colonel Curre's search into the unknown that all is not as it should be, and it is therefore time they put their house in order.

CHAPTER THREE.

CONDITION AND CUB-HUNTING.

ON the methods and system of the above hangs the future of the coming season. These, and these alone, spell success or failure. Without a proper observance of these essentials, the best pack of hounds in the world will not catch their foxes. For this reason I take the above title as my text, in the hope of impressing beginners with the importance thereof. Midsummer is past, and before this article appears, much of the conditioning should have been done, but let us hope the sermon will not have been wasted.

Even amongst experts there seems a difference of opinion as to the appearance of a hound in good condition, and this difference can be easily noted in visiting a number of kennels. There are some people who like to see their hounds big and lusty at the beginning of the season, and who say it is best to have something to start on, whilst others like to begin

with every rib showing, and believe it is easier to work on than work off. I should prefer the latter of the two systems, but consider both are wrong. The old hound should never be allowed to lose the muscle he developed in the last season, and should have sufficient exercise all summer to retain it. What that exercise should be and how much should be given must be left to the discretion of the man in charge.

No hard and fast rule can be made as to the time, distance or pace of summer exercise—all three must depend to a certain extent on the weather. When the sun is very hot and the roads dusty, the pace should be slow, and the distance curtailed; but against this it should be remembered there are many hot days in the latter part of August and beginning of September, when, if a pack is not inured to exercise in the heat of the day, it will be seeking the shade instead of killing a cub.

In addition to the regular horse exercise, which in a well-organised establishment will be completed before the sun has had time to gain much power, it is of great benefit to the health of hounds to walk them out in the afternoon for an hour or two. If there is a field with some trees for shade within a mile or two, the huntsman or whoever is in charge can walk there and sit down, allowing his hounds to play about, dig up pig-nuts, and generally amuse themselves. Of course, two assistants are required to see that none stray or get into mischief. However clean kennels may be kept, the air soon becomes tainted, and the inmates will gain fresh vigour from being taken into the open.

The average kennelman is of very superior class to the ordinary kind of servant, and as a rule always

considers the welfare of the hounds before his own comfort or convenience; it should not be forgotten however, that he is only human, therefore requiring a little pleasure and relaxation apart from his duties. It may be that he will have to rise at four in the morning in midsummer for early exercise, and it is only natural, after a strenuous day, he should desire to get his work done and enjoy a little time to himself. With a master who knows what is required and a huntsman who looks after the interests of the men under him, it is possible to arrange for the staff to get alternate afternoons off.

When, as I have already said, the men, after an early beginning, have had a hard day, it is only natural they should want to feed in good time and get finished. Now the best time for feeding in hot weather is about an hour before sundown, and it stands to reason that this would prevent the men getting away unless arrangements were made for half the staff to undertake the duty on alternate days. In most establishments there are at least four men, including the huntsman and feeder, so that it should be possible to arrange. With the food ready, two men would be sufficient to feed, do the few minutes' walk in the grass yard, and clean up.

In a pack there are always gross feeders that will be ready to gorge themselves at any hour or in any weather, but the less greedy and the young hounds do not appear to gain their natural appetites in the heat of the day. In getting and keeping hounds in condition, it is of the utmost importance that they should *all* feed well.

Mention has already been made of not allowing the entered hound to lose the muscle he made the previous

winter, but the huntsman has also to think of building up muscle on the young entry, many of which may have been reduced to shadows by distemper. A late epidemic of this dread disease will often very seriously handicap a kennel in getting ready for an early autumn campaign against the cubs. A hard morning's cub-hunting is a severe strain on the constitutions of young hounds that have not recovered their strength and which enter quickly. Some take to hunting sooner than others, and it is the huntsman's business to see that these keen youngsters do not overtax their powers.

When regular horse exercise begins, it is better to take the pack at a slower pace for a longer period than to hurry them over the same distance for a shorter time. This is where the huntsman and the stud-groom often come to loggerheads. The hound has, and only wants, his one meal a day, whereas the horse with his small stomach requires feeding every four hours, and is all the better if the interval is less. The stud-groom is responsible for the well-being of his charges, and naturally grumbles when they are kept from their mangers for six or seven hours in a day. The horses which are meant to carry the hunt servants in the season may do hound exercise once a week, but the master should provide half a dozen ponies solely for this hard work.

The late George Gillson, when huntsman to the Cottesmore, and a first-class kennelman, had an excellent plan which others might well adopt. Starting out early with the pack, he would get back to kennels about eight o'clock, then, when he and his men had breakfasted, they would set off again for a further round on a fresh lot of horses. In this way, hounds

had the benefit of long exercise, and the resources of the stable were not unduly strained.

Twice a week is enough for long exercise, and fifty miles is not too much when the pace is slow. In those counties where bridle-roads exist, it is usually possible to keep the hounds on the grass, but a certain amount of exercise on the hard road is good for the feet. It should, however, be remembered that although slow road work hardens the pad, fast work wears it down.

A huntsman, in exercising, would do well to make a round of all the distant places where he is likely to be in the season, so that young hounds will acquire a knowledge of the country. At the same time, he can take the opportunity of visiting "walks" to see how the puppies sent out are progressing.

In advising long exercise, it should be distinctly understood that the longer the distance it is intended to go, the slower the pace should be. Even when horses are merely walking, hounds will be dropping back, forging ahead, and playing about, so that the distance covered will be as much again.

In the last fortnight before cub-hunting begins, it is a good plan to give the pack several smart spins on the grass, gradually increasing the pace, but always regulating it to the pace of the slowest hound. Unless some fast work is done, the lungs do not get the practice required for the stiff ordeal they will have to undergo later on.

There are some masters and huntsmen who look on cub-hunting as a means of getting their packs in condition, and are satisfied to commence with their hounds as fat as bulls. In my humble opinion, a pack ought to be as fit on the day it starts with the

cubs as it is supposed to be at Christmas. Backs may be big and broad with no ribs showing, but there should not be an ounce of fat. When you see hounds, after about an hour's work in covert on a hot morning, lie down panting in the rides, you may be quite sure their huntsman has neglected to give them sufficient exercise. The battle between hounds and foxes is always decided in favour of the one that is fittest. The fox is, however, at a disadvantage in hot weather, having a much thicker coat than the hound, and very soon becomes distressed, so that with equal fitness and a moderately good nose, the hound should always score. If a pack started cub-hunting in really hard condition, they would have little difficulty in quickly reducing a litter to the requisite number without the mobbing and heading back. I admit that on a hot, stuffy morning, the hounds, being closer to the ground than we who are mounted on horses, find a worse atmosphere for breathing, but foxes, being still nearer to the ground, are faced with the same conditions. The hound with an ordinary good constitution, in perfect health and free from worms, will get big and lusty with work, provided that when he commences hunting he is thoroughly fit. If given the choice of two packs, neither having undergone the necessary preparation, I should unhesitatingly take the half-starved one in preference to one loaded with fat. The former might be too weak to do a long day, but would be able to keep up the pace whilst their strength lasted; whereas the other would be choked in a few minutes. I recall a saying of Tom Firr's : "A fat hound, a fat horse, and a fat man are no good to themselves or anyone else."

The methods of cub-hunting must be left to the

discretion of the master, and however much onlookers may disagree, they should be careful never to voice their criticisms aloud. The master and his huntsman proceed on lines which they consider the best for killing cubs and in the interests of sport for the coming season. Whether these methods are right or wrong, it is not for us to say, but we can always safely assume they have been adopted for good reasons, and with the best intentions.

In this article, I am just setting down my own ideas, and in no sense is it meant to be a criticism of other men's methods. Everyone has a good and sufficient reason for his opinions, which he is entitled to hold, and which it would be impertinent for us to say were wrong because we did not agree with them. On one point only I refuse to budge, and that is that hounds should be in hard condition when they commence.

The time to start cub-hunting is more or less dependent on the harvest, but it is as well not to begin until it is possible to continue at least twice a week. The ground, being as hard as iron, should never deter a master from the pursuit of operations against the cubs, and, should he fear for the legs of his hunters, he can always purchase ponies at small prices to carry on with. Huntsmen may say the hard ground is productive of shaken shoulders and toes down. A shaken shoulder means a bad shoulder, and the sooner the individual is drafted the better, even though he pleased the judges on the flags and Peterborough. A well-balanced hound with really good shoulders will never injure them, however fast he may go on the hardest ground. The foot that cannot stand anything

except the softest going is evidently a foot not to be encouraged.

In the regular season, the master has to consider the wishes of his field, but cub-hunting is the time when he is entitled to think only of his hounds, and he should never be persuaded against his better judgment to do anything which he thinks not for their interests. Should Fate, however, ordain that hounds were to run a fox across the open, most masters would only be too pleased their supporters were on the spot to enjoy a gallop, but in that case the field should remember they are participating only on sufferance and should be careful to give the pack plenty of room, never riding directly in its wake. Of course, it would be for the good of sport if the hard rider would abstain from pressing on the pack in the regular season; but in cub-hunting, with the young hounds just beginning to enter, it is of the utmost importance they should not have their attention distracted by horses galloping close to them. When the entry have learnt to go to "cry," I am of the opinion that even the huntsman would do well to give them a wide berth in the open. When they come to a check, the old hounds will get their heads down and search for the missing clue all the more readily because their huntsman is not on the spot to give his assistance. The youngsters will observe the actions of their elders, and will learn the important lesson that a close search of the ground, and not staring in the air, is the only way of recovering the lost scent. The man who imagines himself a heaven-born huntsman may wish to hunt the fox himself, but the ordinary mortal prefers to leave that to his pack, which, to be successful, must be self-reliant. Cub-hunting can make or mar a pack.

Let us imagine you have taken a two-day-a-week pack in a provincial country, and you are about to try your hand with foxhounds for the first time. The corn, being cut, you have fixed your meet with the consent of landowners and farmers. Even though you have advertised in local papers, you are careful to let earth-stoppers and keepers know where you mean to begin operations. This covert you chose because you know from reliable authority it harbours a strong litter. On the first morning it is of the utmost importance that young hounds should find at once, and not be sickened by blank draws, or, worse still, be stopped because there is only an old fox. Farmers may want you to draw turnip fields and other unlikely spots for outlying foxes, which, of course, must be done, but as the chances of finding are problematical, never risk it on the morning the young hounds are to be initiated into the mysteries of hunting. Every available hound in the kennel, some twenty-three couple, surround your horse when you arrive at the meet, a cross adjacent to the covert that holds the litter. The advance of daylight is just filtering through the tree-tops, but the shadows of night still linger beneath. You have laboured assiduously to get your hounds in hard condition, and, whilst awaiting the sun's rising, you feel well satisfied in looking down on the glossy coats that cover the rippling muscles on backs and loins. In spite of the early hour, at least a dozen turn up riding, and there are several enthusiastic hunters afoot. An old gentleman with grey whiskers on a pony looks the pack over, and, as he notes their fitness, he nods his approval of them to their young huntsman, with the remark, "If their noses are good enough, they ought

to catch foxes." Others who may know less about it are inclined to be critical, and, having been accustomed to see fat hounds at this period of the year, think because they can discern ribs now that the pack will be skeletons before the end of the season. The less a man knows about hunting, the more emphatic he is in his opinions, and the readier at all times to lay down the law on any point affecting the sport. By this remark, I lay myself open to be classed amongst the ignorant, for am I not laying down the law?

After this digression, we will return to the meet, where, a few minutes beyond the time fixed, you move off to draw the covert—a wood of about forty acres. There are some good rides, and a portion having been cut down the previous year, is now a tangled mass of undergrowth, interlaced with blackberry briars that will be a formidable barrier to hounds in pursuing cubs.

Approaching the road from the up-wind side—you don't want to catch an old fox asleep—preceded by your first whip, you pause a moment to give final instructions, and then, with an "eleu-in," the older hounds will make a dash for the covert. The young ones will know by the manner of their elders they are in quest of something, without knowing what it is, but you will do well to persuade all to enter the undergrowth. It was your intention to go straight to the cut-down portion, but before you can reach it an old hound comes dashing into the ride, and the next moment he is throwing his tongue—a call that speedily brings the others to his aid. Your pack, in the exuberant spirits of good health and condition, drive down the ride as if a fox was in view, and, in conse-

quence, their ardour carries them many yards beyond where they should have turned off, when up go their heads, looking for the moment rather ashamed of themselves. Stand still and watch, holding up a hand to check those riders who followed you into the covert. The veteran who first owned the line, though carried on with the others, knows exactly how far he had the scent, and returning to the spot soon puts matters right. This is the drag of the old dog fox, when he returned from his nightly prowls about an hour ago. Scent is none too good after this distance of time amidst the dead leaves of the previous winter, and the pack are now content to hunt steadily with many pauses, but the voice of the veteran can be heard putting them right each time.

The old fox, having curled up for a comfortable sleep, was awakened by the clamour, and, after waiting to make certain that it was his line they were hunting, he stole quietly away down wind. Now the pack reach the still warm kennel, and the intermittent cry grows suddenly to a full-voiced chorus. Gallop on and try to keep in touch with them. The whistle sounds, and you know the fox is away; but you had given orders not to go away with an old fox, and the crack of the whip tells you those orders are obeyed. Hurry now and get to their heads, then swing round, and with a cheer gallop back to the wood where you fancy the cubs are lying. Hounds are sensitive animals and should never be rated unless they are doing wrong. It is not their fault you don't want to hunt old foxes, and they should be stopped with as little fuss as possible. On this occasion you are fortunate, as a cub which had been lying not far from his father and had been disturbed by the racket,

crosses the ride into the thick jungle just in front of you. With a cheer you throw the pack in close at his brush, and then the fun commences.

The whole litter of five are afoot at once, and the pack is split up into as many sections. Leave them alone, and then every cub will get a share of the hustling. Meanwhile, the young hounds are taking a hand in the game, having had a whiff of the intoxicating fox scent, are eager for more and desperately keen to pursue. The cubs can creep about under the briars, however, much faster than hounds, and for the time have the advantage, but they are kept continually on the move, and several are showing signs of distress.

After nearly an hour's hunting in thick brush, a fine cub dashes across the ride to comparatively clear going beneath the trees. Blow your horn and cheer the others on. The majority respond immediately to your voice, and a glorious melody is soon echoing under the shelter of the oaks. The cub is following much the same line his father took, and a few minutes later the whistle announces he has left the covert. Your orders were to "let everything go." You must decide quickly whether to allow hounds to go away with this cub, or to take them back and give the others a still further hustling. This is evidently one of the straight-necked sort that will grow into a good fox; give him a respite, therefore, to-day, and sacrifice the less adventurous on the altar of "blood."

Now is your opportunity, for the pack is silent, having overshot the line, and you must get them away before they recover it. Get to their heads, and with a cheer you can divert their attention until they are beyond the route the cub had taken.

Good ! you did that well, and you can now go back to rout out the other cubs. That is, you find, easier said than done, and it is some little time before hounds can discover where they are hid. At last, one that had hoped to escape further pursuit by creeping under a mass of thorns is located by a young hound, but the thorns being too dense for his inexperience, he can only bay the cub from the outside. His bayings, however, soon gather the pack to his assistance, and the quarry is obliged to flee. They are all at him now, and though the ground is foiled there is scent enough to keep him moving. The music stops, and there is dead silence. The weary cub has doubled back and laid down again. Let them refind him on their own initiative, and say nothing.

A shrill note from a single hound followed by a full-throated chorus, and the thorns and bushes crackle as the pack force their way through. A growling, a worrying, and all is over. Two hours' hard work in thick covert. Thanks to having them in hard condition, your hounds now are nearly as fresh as when they started. You might easily catch a second tired cub if you wish, but don't be persuaded to draw another covert. It is always good to take hounds back to kennels flushed with success, but still more important for young hounds on their first day. It is better they should go home full of confidence in themselves, and come out again with only a day's interval, rather than have a severe gruelling on the initial morning.

Opinions vary considerably on the amount of covert work that young hounds which are destined to disport themselves in a grass country, should be made to go through. In provincial countries, and where there are

numerous woodland, this is a question that does not have to be considered, but in the shires it is a matter that has to be carefully thought out by master and huntsman. Unless hounds are taught to go into thick covert and push out their foxes, they will acquire the habit of standing about the rides and waiting for the signal of "gone away." The result will be that in future coverts are never properly drawn, and, worse still, the pack cannot be trusted to follow a tired fox that is crawling about dense undergrowth as a last resource.

It must not, however, be forgotten that cub-hunting is, after all, merely an education and a rehearsal for the serious business later on. Hounds have to be taught they must force their foxes away, but they must realize the hard work entailed is the prelude to the pleasure of a run in the open. When once their fox is away, the quicker they are out of covert the more likely they are to catch him. If you were always to go away with the first cub, a litter would never get properly hustled, and the best cubs would be killed, whilst the less adventurous would escape. At the same time, it is liable to sicken hounds and make them slack in leaving covert, when they are continually being stopped after forcing a fox away. Never to hold up and go away with the last cub is a sound principle for a grass country: but can you always be certain which is the last cub? With all due deference to the opinions of great authorities, I consider it very detrimental to a pack, which, after several have left, eventually settle to one cub and drive him to the open only to be stopped, taken back, and then find all the others have gone away.

Many huntsmen seem to forget that foxes are nocturnal animals with heavy coats, and are far easier to kill in the open with the sun on them than in the comparative darkness of a covert. Killing foxes in covert more often than not falls to the lot of the idle hounds that do no work and stand about waiting for the others to drive them out.

What we want to do in cub-hunting for our ultimate pleasure in the season, is to teach a pack to hunt a fox to death with its nose, and not use eyes for that purpose.

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE START OF THE SEASON.

BEFORE these lines appear in print most packs will either have begun, or their opening meets will be close at hand. The time seems appropriate to think over our misdeeds in the past and to form good resolutions for the future. There is some intoxicant in the sport of fox-hunting that goes to the head and makes its devotees do strange things they would not dream of under other circumstances. The keener a man is, the more likely he is to be drunk with the spirit of the chase, and the onlooker must therefore be asked to forgive this temporary lapse from sobriety. In common courtesy to the non-hunting world, we ought at this period of the year to think very seriously of our conduct before we set out to ride across country. In the heat and ardour of a gallop in which we may happen to be well placed, we are apt to forget everything except the desire to be near hounds, but before the season begins it would be as well in cool moments to impress on our minds certain fixed rules.

The first thing to remember is that we owe our pleasure to those over whose land we hunt, for which privilege it behoves us to do as little damage as possible. There are people hunting to-day who have not had the advantages of a country life and are unable to understand the tribulations of those earning a living from the soil. It may be that some of these visitors are under the impression that, having paid a subscription, they have bought the right to ride over the land, and any loss the occupier may sustain is covered by their contribution to the hunt funds. A slight error this, which they would do well to dismiss from their minds as speedily as possible. The expenses of a hunt in a fashionable country, such as the upkeep of hounds and horses, are very heavy. The usual custom at the present day is for the master to be handed a certain proportion of the subscriptions and the remainder devoted to the payment of compensation. The amount received by the master is only a help to him in maintaining the hunt, and he must delve pretty deeply into his own pocket to supply the deficit.

Perhaps one of these occasional visitors, in reading the hunt's annual statement of accounts, may think that because he sees large sums for poultry claims and broken fences that the amount represents the actual damage done. Far from it ! The claims sent in and duly settled represent only a tithe of the actual loss. There must be rogues in every class, and doubtless a few farmers claim for more than they have lost, whether by broken fences or chickens slaughtered, but it should be remembered that many occupiers of land suffer in silence and never send in a claim. Then in spite of numerous large estates being sold, there are still a few small land owners left who, owing to the increased cost of everything, are unable to hunt, but having followed hounds in the past,

and being still lovers of the sport, would never dream of making a complaint to the hunt secretary. Is it not, therefore, up to those who can afford to give long prices for horses, to see that these good sportsmen are not annoyed by wanton damage? A little thought for others, a little care when in pursuit of our pleasure, and we shall always retain that good feeling which should exist between those who hunt and those who provide the ground to hunt over.

Everyone who has given the matter any thought must be fully aware of the monetary value of hunting to the country at large, but though reaping the reward with the rest of the community, the farmer gets no direct benefit. A very small percentage may sell odd haystacks and a few quarters of oats. In a grazing country a farm cannot be run on the chance of being able to sell hay, that commodity being grown and made for feeding cattle in the winter. With a mild winter much less hay is consumed and there is some left for the fox-hunter the following season. If hay of good quality is to be bought in the district where a man intends to hunt, he should most certainly buy it direct from the farmer and not send for it elsewhere. Let him give a good price and not haggle over it. One or two pounds a ton may be paid beyond market price, but a hunter consumes such a small amount that this extra cost will mean very little. Farmers, as a rule, are not as particular in their hay-making as they might be, and it would perhaps be a good thing if the master offered a substantial prize each year for the best sample grown within the limits of the hunt. I mean by a prize not a silver cup but a good fat cheque which would be of some use to the winner. The idea is worth the consideration of masters, as, in addition to encouraging farmers to exercise greater care in hay-

making, it would give buyers of hay the opportunity of knowing where they could purchase the best quality.

In those counties where grass is predominant and hunting finds the greatest favour, oats are not grown in sufficient quantity to meet the demand, but there are always a few arable fields in the best turf areas, and hunting men should try to buy their corn where they hunt before ordering elsewhere. It is the least we can do for the privilege we enjoy.

I must admit that the unfortunate individual who has spent most of his boyhood in a town is at a great disadvantage when he begins hunting. However well intentioned he may be "wheat" and "seeds" are words that convey little to him, so that he will ride over both in happy ignorance of his crime. He can try to learn and then endeavour to put himself in the place of the farmer whose crop he damages. Personally, my belief is that very little damage is done by riding over wheat when there is a fairly good plant, but we have to consider what the farmer thinks about it and not what our private opinions on the subject may be. A good farmer looks with pride on the orderly rows of green shoots that have responded to his sowing, and when he visits the field next day to find its fair surface pock-marked by the feet of two hundred horses, you can hardly be surprised at his being annoyed. The first-class farmer looks on his fields as you would on your garden.

The man who is close to hounds when they are running fast may be forgiven if he leaves a gate open, and the majority of farmers would excuse him, but when there is no particular hurry gates should always be closed. Gates are very friendly things when we wish to avoid the fences, but we should remember they are meant for keeping the stock in the fields and if left open the farmer

may spend half the night searching for his cattle. The gates, however, which it is most important should be closed, are those leading on to roads. Cattle, and especially horses, may stray many miles before they are recovered, which, apart from the risk of being run into by motor cars, gives the unfortunate stock-owner endless trouble. These things cannot always be avoided, but at least we should try as far as we can, each by our own individual effort, to lessen the chance of such happenings. I am rather afraid there is a tendency in big fields to-day to act as a crowd and to lose the sense of personal responsibility. A red coat was always considered the uniform of a gentleman, and in the country is still regarded as such, so that it behoves those who sport the gay garment to see they do nothing to disgrace the colour. A consideration for the feelings of others is almost universally thought to be the first qualification of a gentleman. In order to retain that good feeling which from earliest times has existed between fox-hunters and the whole countryside, the former must bear in mind the qualifications mentioned above.

In the last few years the motor car has been the means of severing the pleasant relations between visitors and non-hunting residents. Very few people ever hack to the meet nowadays and the car awaits the finish of the day's sport. Although a man may never have the chance of riding to hounds the love of hunting is inherent in nearly all those who are country bred, and everyone wants to know what hounds have done. Riding to the meet and riding home again afforded opportunities to pass "the time of day," discuss sport, and generally become better acquainted.

The excitement of a hunt or an attack of nerves are the chief factors in causing those little outbursts of

temper which individuals normally correct in their behaviour, but of which they are occasionally guilty in the hunting field. At these moments we are each and all liable to transgress the common laws of courtesy, to do and say things which in calmer moments afoot we should never dream it was in our nature to do or say. Of course, these temporary ebullitions of temper are entirely the fault of the horse—no doubt about it—that animal being responsible for conveying to his rider a natural waywardness of disposition. The men with failing nerve are more susceptible to this baleful influence, and he who becomes irritable on the slightest provocation can be set down as having lost that necessary adjunct to a horseman. The good feeling, the humour and the pleasure of the hunting field can only be properly enjoyed if all and sundry are affected with the friendly spirit of the sport. For this reason, we should exercise a stern control over our words and actions, more particularly on those mornings when “liver” or other complications have disturbed somewhat our usual serene frame of mind. A collision in a gateway may or may not have been your fault, and it is always a difficult matter to decide. But whatever you may think, common politeness demands an apology. This is only one of a hundred little incidents that may happen in the course of a day, and though sometimes our tempers be severely strained we must keep our tongues in check. We go hunting to enjoy ourselves, and any unpleasantness that is allowed to develop into words spoils the cheeriness and destroys the glamour that sport should convey to all.

I have dealt rather fully with this subject because at the beginning of the season we ought to start out with good resolutions.

An old stager may perhaps offer a few words of advice

without offence to those who are taking the field for the first time.

Horses suitable to the country have to be purchased and sufficient to hunt the number of days desired, but before launching out in expensive horseflesh and thereby depleting the exchequer, subscriptions should be the initial outlay. Unfortunately, subscriptions are frequently the last item to be thought of and in consequence other expenses having been larger than expected, the hunt funds have to suffer. A man should not think how little he can give, but how much. Whatever he pays he will be hunting more or less at the expense of the master. The custom of sending the hunt secretary his cheque in the middle of the season, or even still later, has of late years grown into a habit. With the majority of people this is only slackness, but it is quite wrong, as subscriptions are due on November the First, and should be promptly paid. Some old members of the hunt are often the worst offenders, but their dilatory payments do not excuse the newcomer from following suit. It is not a pleasant thing for a secretary to have to dun an acquaintance whom he is continually meeting in the hunting field.

I dislike dwelling on this crude subject of money in a hunting article, but if a hunt is to be run on proper lines, the management must know what funds they will have to carry on with, and it is only by prompt payment of claims that things will go smoothly.

Now let us get on to the covert side, and wash out the meet, which, however, it is as well to attend punctually because that is the time when you may be allowed to wag your tongue. If you intend to be in the first flight—everyone means to get there—you must cut out conversation the moment hounds enter the covert. Eyes and ears should be on the alert for the first signal of “gone

away." The advantage lost or gained at the start by the fraction of a second may mean all the difference in a quick thing, of riding to the backs of other men or riding to hounds. The nearer you are to the pack the more important it is not to ride directly in their wake. Keep your eye on the leading hound, but don't ride to him. About "three points abaft the beam" to port or starboard of the main body is the correct position. By always watching the leading hounds you will know, or learn in time, the moment they have lost the scent, and the instant you observe them hesitate, you must check your horse in his stride. Failing to do this you will, if in a prominent position, cut off the pack from making its swing, and with the result of a long check.

With a really good scent and whilst the fox runs straight, the leading hounds have no difficulty in driving on, but should the fox turn aside their impetuous eagerness will carry them beyond the turn and if the main body is pressed on, it will also lose the thread.

You will therefore see that should nerve, horsemanship and ambition take you into the first flight, this coveted honour carries with it much greater responsibilities than a less prominent place, and it behoves you to be extra careful. A good and hard rider who takes little notice of what hounds are doing, may do more harm than the remaining three hundred. The man able to "cut out the work" will have many followers and should he not stop in time he will have led a crowd over the line.

I have thus far been only referring to the smart gallop, when hounds leave covert close behind their fox and for many glorious minutes race him over the grass. Fate however, does not often throw these good things in our path, and a bad scent or some other misfortune condemns us very frequently to slow hunts. Perhaps what is

worse, is the day when hounds with a catchy sort of scent race across one field and throw up their heads, a proceeding they continue to repeat at intervals. The pace for those few seconds is usually sufficient to stir the blood of youth and the consequence is a mad rush, which will drive the pack many yards beyond where it last touched the scent. These are the most trying days a huntsman has to endure, and as the master can only be in one place at once it is very difficult to restrain a big field that is bursting with the desire to gallop.

The really slow hunt, when hounds show no signs of getting up any speed, and with their heads down have to work out every yard of the line, does not breed the same excitement, and the field are more easily controlled.

The master of a fashionable pack has a very hard task in keeping order and the performance of his duties frequently spoils his own pleasure in the sport. We ought to remember this and be ready at any time to obey unquestionably any command he may give. He is there to show us sport, and we should do all in our power to make his labours as light as possible. "Hold hard" should be the signal to halt and stand still, not just slow up and walk on. Masters are only human and therefore liable like other people to err occasionally, but whether it be right or wrong, no one should ever dispute or argue about an order given by the man in authority. In the heat of the moment, a master—his temper is oft-times sorely tried—may address you in very strong language, which you would resent from any other individual, but however much you dislike being sworn at, you must never utter a word in reply. You might get the blame for an offence of which you were innocent, but even then you should still keep your mouth shut and take your gruel as if you deserved it. There would be no

harm in writing a polite note to the master, explaining the circumstances afterwards, but nothing excuses an argument with him in the field.

However much or little you may know about the science of hunting, it is as well to keep your private opinion of the huntsman locked up in the sacred places of your heart, and not give the world at large your ideas on his qualifications for the post. The master who engages a huntsman does his best to get the best available man, and he naturally does not appreciate outside criticism of his servant.

All who take interest in the sport are entitled to their own opinions as to the way a fox should be hunted and hounds handled, but spectators should never express them in public. In the interests of the huntsman alone it is unfair to criticise adversely, as a few idle words may injure his reputation, on which he depends for a living. A few good gallops with the luck to bring foxes to hand at the finish, and the huntsman would be proclaimed a marvel, whereas a succession of bad scenting days and unsatisfactory runs would bring on the same man a general verdict of incompetence. A huntsman's reputation should stand on the performance of his pack, but unfortunately many of the profession seem to think more of exhibiting their own skill. They want by clever casts and anticipating of the fox's movements to bring a run to a successful conclusion instead of trusting to their hounds. However expert they may be, the time will come when their knowledge is at fault and the pack which has never been allowed to solve a problem unaided will be looking for assistance when it ought, with heads down, to be searching for the lost clue. This fault in huntsmen can be set down as the result of indiscriminate criticism by the field, who look on a pack of hounds as a machine,

that no matter how handled is expected to function when required. In thinking of and "playing to the gallery," it is perhaps only natural that huntsmen should endeavour by their own skill to acquire fame for themselves and forget what is due to the pack. To encourage the right principle, we ought, therefore, in bestowing praise to extol the performances of the pack and not the man who handled it. I fear we are often guilty of ignoring hounds' efforts and giving all credit to the man, so that we are more or less to blame for those huntsmen who are inclined to place themselves first.

In a fashionable country with a large number of people all eager to be near the front, it is not an easy matter to see exactly what hounds are doing, and it is safe to say that a large proportion of the crowd never try to watch them. It is therefore rather presumptuous of these people to comment favourably or otherwise on the tactics a huntsman considers necessary to employ, and which he thinks the situation demands.

Whether a huntsman is heaven born or one with only a very limited knowledge of hunting, he is the sole person able to form a correct estimate of what happens in the course of a run, and we must leave the matter in his hands. He knows his hounds—we don't—and at a check he should know exactly where scent failed.

Hunting hounds is a one-man job, so that he who is entrusted with the horn should be left entirely alone and allowed to work out all problems that come before him according to his rights. None of the field would be at all likely to offer a huntsman advice, but even murmurs carry a long way to a quick ear, and a sensitive man can feel the criticism in an unspoken word. Authorities on the subject deny animals any reasoning power, but many of those with much practical experience think otherwise.

Old hounds seem to have an uncanny knowledge of the direction a fox has taken when there is no scent to guide them, and though instinct may help, it must be reason, based on past experience, that points out the way. The hard riders are oft rather impatient with these veterans of the chase and frequently do not give them the opportunity of proving their wisdom. In a sharp burst youth will be served and the five or six-season hounds must be content to follow on, but unless cut off or pressed by horses they justify their existence at a check. In fact, if these ancient warriors were given sufficient room, many of the checks that now take place would never occur at all. It is on behalf of these warriors of the pack that I venture to remind the beginner of the importance of not riding too close.

When possible, most people prefer to ride on the downwind side of the pack, but it should not be forgotten that the fox is more likely to turn with the wind, and those occupying that position must be particularly careful not to get too forward. When you see hounds swinging in a cast turn your horse's head the way they point. Failing to do this may prevent them completing their swing and finding the scent, which they might otherwise have done. If hounds can recover the line themselves they will lose less time at a check and also, by gaining confidence in their own powers, will run all the better afterwards.

Before launching out into the hectic atmosphere of a fashionable country, a man would do well to learn the rudiments of the game in the "provinces." Of course, it is best when the knowledge has been acquired in boyhood, but nowadays many, both men and women take to hunting comparatively late in life and are therefore at a considerable disadvantage on being introduced

to the sport amidst a field of three hundred. The fact that they are expert and competent horsemen may assist them in keeping near hounds, but it will not prevent them spoiling runs for others as well as themselves, and generally being nuisances to the hunt officials. The few hints jotted down in this article are meant for those with little experience of the hunting field and in the hope they may assist in avoiding mistakes. The man who rashly plunges into the vortex of a grass country without any previous knowledge of hunting has many things to learn, but if he will only keep eyes and ears open, with the fixed determination to watch hounds and take an intelligent interest in what they are doing, he should soon improve. The mistake which the novice usually makes is in thinking that the chief aim to obtain the pleasures of the chase is to gallop fast and jump fences, and in thus doing compete against other hard riders. If they would only realise that watching hounds and their methods of hunting a fox is an absorbing study in itself, they would reap far greater enjoyment out of a day's sport. Skimming over fences in a quick gallop on the back of a good horse will provide thrills that nothing else on earth can equal, but except for a few minutes the sensation loses more than half its flavour unless the pack can be seen and heard.

To enjoy the fullest excitement of a hunt a man should identify himself with the aims of hounds and huntsman—the ultimate capture of the fox. Let him forget the fences, the pace, the other men competing, and concentrate on what the fox is doing or likely to do. It matters not that he will be more often wrong than right in his surmises, but it will increase his interest in the result. Like many other things in this life, more satisfaction is gained out of hunting by submerging the ego and extending

a whole-hearted sympathy to the end that others are striving to attain.

Our sympathies must always be with the hunters or otherwise the merciful disposition of our natures will assert itself and we shall lose interest in the sport by dwelling on the feelings of the hunted. A fox lives by hunting, and unless I am much mistaken rather enjoys the excitement of trying to outwit hounds, a game at which he frequently succeeds.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE M.F.H.

THE Master is certainly an autocrat, but at the same time he is the unpaid servant of his field and the services required of him are by no means light. Gratitude for the work this man does and for the money he spends might be expected from those that hunt with him, but unfortunately such is often not the case; carping criticism and unkind comments frequently are his only reward.

The duty of the field is to obey the master's behests without query or remark, and when that individual chooses to use strong language to enforce his orders, the unpalatable epithets must be swallowed like honeyed words. It may happen occasionally that the recipient of the master's stinging remarks has been unjustly accused and he will naturally feel rather sore, but however much he would like to remonstrate and plead "not guilty," he must keep his mouth closed and say nothing at the moment. Later in the day or when a run is over and the difficult task of controlling an over-eager field is no longer worrying the master's mind, an opportunity may be found to explain the situation. Perhaps

the better plan is to wait for the calming influence of a good dinner and write a short note stating the facts, when he will in all probability receive an apology, good feeling will be restored between the two and an unpleasant incident will be forgotten. If, however, the individual is a hardened offender, and though guiltless on the occasion, has many previous sins on his conscience, he had better say nothing, for it is likely enough the ruling authority is dealing out condemnation for those lapses from good behaviour in the past.

A hunt of any size without a master would be a disorderly mob, and it is for the benefit of all that there should be someone with supreme authority in control. His position and power are given him by the members of his hunt so that it can be seen that it is only by their loyal support he is able to wield his sceptre. The master is, for the time being, a sovereign, and whilst he wears the crown of office he must have the unquestioned loyalty of his subject. However, many faults he has and however much he may mismanage the affairs of the hunt, he should still retain the respect and co-operation of its members. By them he was elected to the post and on them he depends for their cordial support.

In the perfect master there are as many qualities required as in an efficient Prime Minister. Tact, courtesy and good-humour are of great assistance to the M.F.H., but perhaps the most important is an iron control over temper. Everyone with anything in him may be said to have temper, but "good tempered" and bad-tempered" are misnomers, the one has control over it, and the other has not. In the course of a day's hunt there are many occasions when the thoughtless acts of individuals are enough to try the patience and temper of a saint, but the master will never gain anything by

allowing his temper to get out of hand. Even in the most flagrant case of over-riding or other misdemeanour, a few well-chosen, biting words uttered in a cool voice will have more effect than a string of bad language in heated accents.

Without further preamble let it at once be understood that our sympathies are always with the master, but that does not blind us to the fact that if the field owe him unswerving loyalty, he is equally under obligation to make their days agreeable. First and foremost he should remember that hunting is a recreation ; that we all go out to enjoy ourselves and have a good time, which is apt to be spoilt by an outbreak of ill-temper in the master. The good feeling and sportsmanship of the hunting-field between all classes are some of its greatest charms, so that any friction likely to cause unpleasantness should be rigidly avoided.

There is good reason to suppose that men occasionally take on the duties and responsibilities of mastership without realizing the serious obligations entailed.

Perhaps it may be logically said that their first duty is to the committee and the members of the hunt ; but apart from all questions of sport and finance, the welfare of a country lies with the landowners and occupiers. It is the business of the master to know both these sections personally and to establish friendly relations. This cannot be done with success unless the M.F.H. lives in the district and spends most of his time there.

During the hunting season he has few spare moments for such obligations and must devote a large portion of the summer to that purpose. In fact, it can truly be said that the good management and control of a country is not done in the winter, but in those months when hounds are in kennel.

The majority of those who become masters are men of means, and many of them have other loves besides hunting. Fishing, shooting, racing and numerous other pursuits exercise their call, the result being that the man who should be looking after the country in the interests of the hunt, is obliged to leave much to his secretary. However good and efficient that individual may be, he is not in the position to deal effectively with difficult and unexpected situations.

Residents in the district and farmers like to feel they have the M.F.H. living amongst them, to see him occasionally, when they can air their grievances and complaints, which a few tactful words will usually smooth away ; whereas, if left to be dealt with officially by a secretary, might assume serious proportions.

The ideal master is the country squire with a passion for the chase and an absorbing interest in hounds, but, unfortunately, this is a class being rapidly taxed out of existence. There are a few still left, and in the counties over which they reign the friendly relations with occupiers of land tend to peace and harmony in the hunting-field. Although these men devote their whole time and energies for the benefit of others without searching for other amusement, they have their reward in that they can never suffer the terrible complaint afflicting the idle—boredom. The man born and bred in the country usually considers himself under obligations to perform certain duties, for which he expects neither thanks nor payment.

In criticizing masters who do not come up to the above high standard and are somewhat careless in the observance of a country's needs, it is as well to remember these men, with only a half-hearted love of hunting, are often begged to fill a gap on account of their ample means

and the weakness of the pack's subscription list. For that reason they must be forgiven their shortcomings, and instead of criticism should be shown every consideration ; for the monetary benefits conferred—"Beggars should not be choosers."

Every country ought to be able to finance its own pack, and ought not to expect the master out of his own pocket to provide sport for those who follow the hounds. There is often a good deal of needless display in the management of a hunt. When the funds are low, expenses should be cut down and the subscribers must be satisfied with less show. A second whipper-in is, of course, a useful asset, but is by no means a necessity, and when the first whipper-in is absent, one of the field can usually be relied on if wanted. Then, very often, many more hounds are kept than are required for sport. Fifteen couples are enough to hunt a fox, that is, if all are good, reliable workers, and not what Jorrocks called "sleeping partners of the chase." Twenty couples for a two days a week country should provide against all contingencies.

A provincial country that has only a small number of subscribers, and those, by reason of limited means, unable to give much, must not expect to keep hounds likely to win at Peterborough. Every hound must be a worker and, as far as sport is concerned, it matters little what he looks like, the main thing is being able to stand a hard day's work and do his fair share in the business of fox-catching. It might be as well if a really poor hunt forgot altogether the type that finds favour at shows. The hound that stands only on the fore part of its toes will often be lame, and the exceptionally straight leg often leads to what is known as "shaken shoulders."

We are inclined to think that this complaint is also

frequently due to bad shoulders. A shoulder with a good slope that gives a nice balance to the whole body when in motion is the most important point. Then, with a combination of back and loins added to the driving power of thighs, you get an animal that will go fast, stay, and never be lame except by an accident.

The country that is content to go on these lines, only asks for good sport and wants no useless ostentation, can run their hunt at a comparatively small cost and have no need to go a-begging to the rich for help.

No one should ever take over the mastership of fox-hounds who has not a real and genuine love for the sport. The desire to appear in the limelight, to acquire social position and importance, has often induced wealthy men to add M.F.H. to their names. However much good sportsmen may depreciate these unworthy reasons and deplore the state of mind which actuates such misguided individuals, the latter must not be blamed, but rather the hunt that elected them, who want to enjoy their sport at someone else's expense.

There have been instances of public-spirited men with only a moderate love of hunting, coming forward to take over a country which, at the time, was threatened with being bereft of both master and hounds. We take our hats off to these kind friends of sport and admire the feelings that prompt their generous actions. In the majority of these cases it will be found that the country threatened with becoming derelict has been hitherto run on a very extravagant scale and the men hunting in it do not realize they might have just as good sport at a tithe of the cost.

In these days hunt committees should be composed of a majority of landowners and farmers with the remainder enthusiastic lovers of the sport. It would

be well if such committees were elected every three years at a general meeting of subscribers and occupiers of land. By these means real live committees would have control and the voters who elected them would each feel they had a personal interest in the welfare of the hunt.

There are still left a few large landowners whose family traditions embrace the keeping of hounds for the benefit of those living in the district, and we can only hope that successive generations will maintain the customs of their ancestors. These men must always be a law unto themselves in the countries over which they preside and criticisms in this article do not apply to them. With increased taxation and heavy death duties, we fear even the wealthiest landowners will find in the years to come that the burden of supporting a pack of hounds on their own shoulders is more than they can bear. Let us hope that the day is still far distant and, meanwhile, those who enjoy the privilege of hunting with such packs, should realise their sport comes out of the master's pocket and be duly grateful for the gift.

Apart from the above special hunts, the average length of a mastership in ordinary countries would be about six seasons—this is a mere guess. Many countries that with the assistance of a combination of intelligent masters and good huntsmen, having built up packs of which they are proud, proceed to acquire the same by purchase in order to retain the virtues they have seen. This is much on a par with the wise men of Gotham, who hedged in the cuckoo in order to enjoy continual summer, and just as likely to be successful.

A pack can be made or marred in six years, and an ignorant huntsman under an incompetent master can, in the above period, ruin the efforts of his predecessor. If the newcomer were content to breed from the best

working hounds and was careful to retain the female lines on which the reputation of the pack had been built, he could not go far wrong, but the "new broom" is usually imbued with the desire to improve the appearance of the hounds he has taken over and sacrifices their good qualities on the altar of good looks. Generally the less a man knows about breeding and the results accruing therefrom, the more confident he will be in arranging his mating. By mating the best-looking sire to the best-looking bitch he will expect their produce to equal if not excel, but he forgets the qualities that both inherit from their ancestors.

A country may thus purchase at a big price the pack which has showed them good sport, and at the end of six seasons may find it practically worthless. For this reason we consider it a mistake for hounds to belong to the country, or if they do they should be taken over at a valuation by the new master and the same process gone through when he retires. Kennel management will also add or detract very materially to the value of a pack and however good it might otherwise be, no one would want a scratching and mangy lot. Although it might take six years to undo the effects of previous breeding, one year of slack and careless methods in the kennel would be sufficient to convert a healthy pack into a body of lepers.

People are apt to forget that hounds are living animals with a comparatively short life, and that with each succeeding year their value must become less.

The strength of a pack must, if it is wished to retain its original value, be continually augmented by breeding and the inclusion of an annual entry. It will be seen therefore that very much is dependant on the man who controls the breeding if the standard is to be

kept up. With distemper and other diseases to which young hounds are subject, an indifferent kennel man may lose the better part of his young entry.

The hunt that owns their pack, therefore, possess a very unstable property, which is always liable to depreciation and may in a short time become worthless.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in taking over a pack at a valuation is in assessing the value, and it is more difficult to-day than it was forty years ago. No one then ever thought of breeding from a hound entirely on account of his or her appearance and the result was every member of a pack could be relied on to be an efficient worker, so that it was safe to judge them entirely by the eye, that is if as a whole they had a good reputation for performance. To-day there are really two standards of value, the one for good looks and the other for good hunting qualities. We rather fear that the former commands the highest price at the moment. When a single hound of exceptionally smart appearance makes over three-hundred at the Rugby sales it is not easy to estimate the value of others.

In declaring a country vacant and open to applications for the position of master, the hunt could always state the price at which the hounds could be taken over. Then, if the prospective master, after seeing them at work in the field and giving them a careful scrutiny on the "flags," did not consider them worth the amount, he could decline. If the country thought it more important to obtain the services of a good man as master than retain their pack, they could offer it for sale at public auction.

The unfortunate ^{fox}foxhound is subject to the fancies, fads and prejudices of individuals. Some insist on a particular colour that pleases the eye ; others require a

straight leg and are regardless of whether the straight line is continued upward to where the point of the shoulder enters the back ; whilst others again refuse to have anything in the kennel that has not well-sloped shoulders and the free movement of the same.

If a man is taking over a country and is going to hunt hounds himself, you must allow him to choose the sort which he considers most suitable for the purpose. To bind him down to hunting the pack belonging to the country against his wishes, would only mean that in a few years, by drafts and breeding he would have converted the original foundation to his own ideas. Whether those ideas are right or wrong for showing sport can only be proved by time, but it is possible the country might find their pack reduced in value from pounds to shillings without any numerical loss. The man who is responsible for a pack losing in value should be made to bear that pecuniary loss, and in the same way the one who improves should reap the benefit thereof.

These remarks are meant more or less to apply to provincial countries where the master usually acts as huntsman. In fashionable grass countries, where subscriptions are on a large scale, things are altogether different. A professional huntsman is almost a necessity and the master has his hands full in controlling the field. The latter has a thankless task and has to pay heavily for the privilege.

The day has not yet come, but is not far distant when these fashionable countries will appoint paid masters. The work entailed is very heavy, both in the hunting season, and in the summer, so that a really conscientious master is tied to the country the whole year round with very few chances of getting away. However keen a man may be it is asking over much to expect him to

devote his whole life to looking after a hunt's affairs, and at the same time pay a considerable sum for its support.

Where it is possible to find such generous individuals to come forward and bear our burdens, there is no reason to make any change if the results are satisfactory. If, however, we are content to accept his money, or rather, the sport it provides, we have no right to find fault or criticise his methods, even if we do not approve. To hunt even partially at the master's expense and then ask him to resign seems a very uncourteous proceeding, and yet if his manner of conducting the sport is unsatisfactory, what else can be done? With a paid master there would be no difficulty of that sort and the committee would have no qualms in finding fault should the occasion arise, or in giving notice to leave. Of course, the right man would have to be carefully selected, but there are hundreds of good sportsmen without the means to hunt regularly who would jump at the chance. The two chief qualifications would be that he was a gentleman and a good sportsman, which, with the ability and nerve to ride across country, would be about all that was required.

Preference would be given to those candidates with experience of country life, a general knowledge of crops, and an acquaintance with the farmers' point of view. The master who does not know one crop from another is rather handicapped when, in the laudable attempt at saving a field from being ridden over, he has not the faintest idea of what is growing there. In selecting a paid master there would be no hesitation in a catechism on such small points, but it would be rather insulting if put to the unpaid.

Whilst men are to be found sufficiently keen and with the public spirit to devote practically their whole time

to the service of a hunt, there is no need to think of a paid master, but there is little doubt the latter would prove more satisfactory than the man whose only qualification is an abundance of wealth.

Having already dwelt on the allegiance and unswerving loyalty which is due from the field to the master, it may be as well to point out that he in return owes a duty to his field. The subscribers to the hunt, the landowners, farmers and inhabitants of the district have certain rights which must not be ignored. We may conclude the master has been elected to that position by the committee on behalf of everyone concerned, so that he starts with the goodwill of the community. Whilst he occupies that position the residents in the country must either hunt with him or not at all, a fact he would do well to bear always in mind when his views do not happen to coincide with those of the field. Although the master must be given free rein to hunt the country in the way he thinks best, he ought not to take advantage of his position to adopt a line of action which is contrary to the wishes of the majority.

Even the man who takes no subscription and is hunting the country entirely at his own expense, owes the same duty to the residents as one who is dependant on what the committee may give him. He may pay for the keep of hounds and horses, for wages, rent of coverts and many other incidental expenses, but he does not pay for the right of hunting the country, and it is a right which cannot be bought.

This is the point the moneyed autocrat might possibly forget, and it is as well to emphasize it here. Such an individual with the desire to take hounds and with the idea of hunting a country solely for his own pleasure, might possibly exist, but is purely imaginary and we

cannot recall hearing of anyone who has filled the character.

However, there never need be any friction between the master and the body that elected him if he establishes a friendly feeling from the first and lets them see his one desire is to show sport. If a total stranger to the country he has only to gain the confidence and sympathy of the inhabitants by tact, when he will be allowed practically to do as he likes.

CHAPTER SIX.

THE HUNTSMAN.

THERE may be some truth in the old saying that a huntsman is born and not made, but like the majority of ancient saws it is not quite correct. The few men born with the gift certainly seem to hunt a fox by natural instinct without the exercise of much brain power, but the ease with which they accomplish their object is apt to make them careless. Then it should not be forgotten that this hunting instinct, inherited from distant ancestors, may be strong enough in youth, but like all inherited qualities, will fade with age. The "heaven born" huntsman, therefore, who does not use his brains and gain knowledge by experience, will find in later life he has lost the art of anticipating a fox's movements. Also, there is the possible danger that the man specially gifted by nature may develop a conceit and place greater confidence in himself than in his hounds. This is a grievous error that must eventually lead to disaster. It is, of course, essential that a huntsman should have confidence in his own abilities in order to make lightning decisions and act on them promptly; but unless he has perfect trust in his hounds he will be at a loss when his own cunning fails.

Given the love of sport anyone may become a huntsman if he will study the subject carefully and glean knowledge from observation. In the "flying" countries it is necessary to be a good rider, have plenty of nerve, and be ready at all times to take instant advantage of an opportunity to get on better terms with a fox. A love of dogs and animals is always a help to the man hunting hounds, as there is then a sympathy between them which it is difficult to define, but is a very important factor in the co-operation of the two.

The two worst faults a huntsman can have are conceit and the inability to control temper. I imagine all men and some women have a certain amount of conceit in their composition, but it is a harmless failing unless a man like the frog in the fable, allows it to swell to bursting point. However long we live there is always knowledge to be acquired and something to be learnt, but hunting is a subject on which the last word can never be said, and a lifetime's study is insufficient to make the student perfect. Men of great repute in the profession of hunting will admit that after many years of the sport they have still much to learn, and it is only lesser lights, who, giving rein to conceit allow themselves to believe they know everything and in consequence take a heavy fall over their ignorance.

Temper is another matter, and every man of character has probably a leaven of this smouldering fire in his composition, but the control of it that makes the difference between the stronger and the weaker mind. A huntsman unable to control his temper is at a great disadvantage, and if allowing it to surge upward to the brain, the incidents of a run and its probable sequence will become blotted out. The man who loses his temper is pretty certain to lose his fox.

In a book on hunting published in 1900, I took the liberty of quoting Beckford on the qualifications of a huntsman, and it will not be out of place to repeat his observations again. "He should be young, strong, bold and enterprising; fond of the diversion and indefatigable in the pursuit of it. He should be sensible and good tempered; he ought also to be sober; he should be exact, civil and cleanly; he should be a good horseman and a good groom; his voice should be strong and clear; and he should have an eye so quick as to perceive which of his hounds carries the scent when all are running; and should have so excellent an ear as always to distinguish the foremost hounds when he does not see them . . . ; he should let his hounds alone when they *can hunt*, and have genius to assist them *when they cannot*."

Customs have changed since Beckford's day, and a huntsman is seldom now required to clean or look after his horses, as he has many other duties to perform; but he would be none the worse if he had held an apprenticeship in the stable under a good groom. In small establishments where the strictest economy has to be observed, a huntsman might have the horses under his care, and without previous experience he would be unable to supervise the stable-helpers.

Methods that are permissible in a grass or flying country are often out of the question in the provinces where hounds may be unseen for the greater part of the day, yet the latter is the better school for a huntsman to learn his business. A whipper-in, who has never been out of the Shires, is frequently promoted to huntsman on the post becoming vacant, more particularly when he has shown marked ability as a horseman in riding across country. It is the ambition of every

hunt servant to attain one of these prizes of the profession and in spite of inexperience no young aspirant to fame would be likely to refuse the offer.

In my humble opinion every huntsman should have at least one season in a woodland country, where he must trust to his hounds and allow them to hunt a fox for themselves. He will then realize that in nine cases out of ten they can hunt a fox without his assistance. This is a lesson that will impress itself on his memory, and which he will not easily forget when in later life he finds himself at the head of three hundred horsemen and the pack at a check. This is a critical moment, very trying to the nerves. The crowd are anxious and impatient to be galloping on, a fact felt and known by the man carrying the horn. The novice who has earned a reputation for quickness as a whip thinks the moment has arrived to show what he can do as a huntsman. He has heard men condemned for being slow, and is determined not to err in that respect, with the result he never allows his hounds to cast themselves. Of course, he may have the good fortune to hit off the line, when the irresponsible element in the field will give him unstinted praise, and he will be confirmed in the error of his ways. Time, however, will find him out, he will repeatedly lose his fox, and hounds when they check will look to him for assistance instead of putting their heads down to try for themselves. The prestige he gained will quickly evaporate and the men who were loudest in acclaiming him a great huntsman will be the first to condemn him as an arrant duffer. A huntsman's reputation may be quickly and easily made, but it is just as easily lost. Any one who has been out hunting half-a-dozen times considers himself competent to criticise the man handling the pack.

Unless a man has won such fame as a huntsman that his position is unassailable by ignorant critics, there will always be some who will find fault with his methods of hunting a fox. Fashionable hunts are supported more or less by the subscribers, and they naturally want a gallop, which, of course, a huntsman is desirous of giving them. Let him, however, beware of allowing his mind to dwell too much on the wishes of the field to the exclusion of his business in hunting a fox.

Although they over-ride hounds and do many other things to irritate the master, the majority of men who go a-hunting are good sportsmen and quick to appreciate seeing a fox fairly hunted to death, when a deficiency in scent has robbed them of getting a gallop.

There may be some people of active mind who are capable of thinking of and doing two things at the same time, but the man who starts out to hunt a fox and allows his wits to wander from the subject for a second, is doomed to failure. If a man starting in this profession asked my advice I should say "Play the game, care not what the field say or think, and concentrate your whole attention on hunting the fox. Your reward will come eventually, and when it comes it will be lasting."

The ideal a huntsman should hold always before his eyes, is not his own reputation, but that of his pack. He will bask in their reflected glory which will not dim with time as his own skill easily might do.

The M.F.H. has many calls on his purse, but when he employs a professional to hunt his pack he might incur still further expense by giving a fixed sum for each fox killed or run to ground. The stipulation to be made that entering another covert without a distinct line in there was equivalent to losing the fox, and to be

considered a fresh draw. It might be a good plan to impose fines for losing, thus a premium of ten pounds for every fox killed or run to ground, and ten shillings for everyone lost. This would put an end to the reprehensible practice of galloping on to the nearest covert, when the first cast has not proved successful, a custom which is very unfair on covert owners and earth stoppers. On a moderate scenting day it is not unusual to see at least half-a-dozen coverts disturbed in the course of one run, or rather what is supposed to be one run. If good sport is to be enjoyed in a grass country it is of the utmost importance the small coverts should be jealously guarded, and never drawn without a three weeks' interval. Foxes may and do make for other coverts, but very seldom when hard run. The custom which exists in some countries of having earths in the coverts is responsible for foxes going there for refuge. In a section of country that is hunted regularly once a week the master as far as possible tries to arrange his meets by dividing it into three, but the number of coverts is limited and if a huntsman hides his incapacity to recover a fox's line by galloping on for another, the coverts will all be hound-stained and the best foxes will either go away or lie out in the fields.

It is a great advantage to a huntsman to be a good horseman and have the nerve to ride over all sorts of fences without allowing the fact to divert his attention from his hounds. In woodlands hearing is essential, and a man should be able to tell by ear alone exactly what hounds are doing, every turn they make and the change of note should they switch on to a fresh fox. Of course, in the open his eye should always be on the pack and be quick to realise the moment a leading hound

fails or falters on the line. That hound may carry on many yards beyond where he last touched the scent, and if the huntsman observed the point of hesitation it will be of great assistance in making his subsequent cast.

A forward cast for a fox is recognised as nearly always the correct method and with a large field of horsemen it is really the only course to employ. Casting forward does not mean the extension of a straight line to an indefinite length as some people seem to imagine.

When hounds check it must mean a fox has turned or been headed from the course he was pursuing as there would be no reason for the check otherwise unless it happened to be manured ground or had been foiled by cattle. A good fox that has been obliged to turn aside to avoid some obstruction it is reasonable to expect will resume his original course at a convenient opportunity, and it is the huntsman's judgment of the fugitive's direction in regaining that route which spells the continuance of a gallop or its end.

The problem which immediately presents itself to a huntsman on the occasion of a check is "what caused it." A farm labourer or shepherd may have been in the field when the fox passed and made him change direction, but by the time hounds arrive the man has disappeared. There are a hundred things which may or may not have happened, and it is the brain quick enough to solve the mystery that usually succeeds.

Unless there is a certain and absolutely sure opportunity of getting on better terms with a fox, more time is lost in lifting than in letting them hunt it out. It is easier to get hounds' heads up than to get them down again. Much depends on circumstances and no rules can be laid down.

When in the middle of a run hounds appear to lose pace and get slower every moment, a huntsman is justified in making a bold forward cast in the hope of getting closer to his fox, as otherwise he will be ultimately run out of scent. When, however, a fox is tired and is turning short or using other subterfuges to escape, hounds should never be touched as long as they can hold a line. The scent of a thoroughly beaten fox is not only much weaker, but changes in character, and it is usually only the old hounds that are able to detect it. The least interference at this moment may make them lose the thread altogether. Unless it is possible to give them a view from which they cannot fail to effect a kill, they are more likely to achieve that result if left to work it out themselves. Probably there are more foxes lost at this period of a run than any other, as the nearness of a good finish tends to create an excitement that makes men noisy and impetuous in action. It is a time when spectators should never utter a sound and a huntsman unable to keep excitement out of his voice should be equally silent. The sensitive hearing organs of a hound are quick to detect the slightest variation in the tones of a voice.

In lifting hounds or making a cast, a huntsman should be quick, but never in a hurry. It is useless casting hounds in a search for lost scent if they are taken too fast and never allowed to put their heads down. Whips are too much inclined to hurry on hounds that are doing their best to recover the lost line, but that is after all the huntsman's fault. A really good huntsman will have his pack in front of him when making a cast and requires little assistance from a whip. In that way he can watch what each hound is doing, which would be impossible if they were dragging at his horse's heels.

In order to accomplish this feat the pack must have the fullest confidence in its huntsman and the man must be an artist.

Although a silent huntsman is preferable to a noisy one the former may err by being too silent. In drawing woodlands or coverts of any size hounds ought to be able to hear the huntman's voice at intervals or they will be listening and wondering where he is instead of looking for a fox. An occasional note on a horn saves the voice in large woods and gives the pack an indication of the direction a covert is being drawn.

The silent huntsman in drawing a large wood will have half the pack at his horse's heels and the remainder ranging so wide that they are unable to hear when a fox is found. It stands to reason that if a hound with head up is straining his hearing to keep in touch with the huntsman he cannot be giving all his attention to searching for a fox. The judicious use of both horn and voice is of great assistance in large coverts, but the former should be used sparingly. Apart from drawing, there is a great art in forcing an unwilling fox to fly from a large wood and keeping the pack together. It sometimes happens when scent is moderate, the leading hound can only speak to the line in such a faint voice that the others cannot hear it, but it should not escape the huntsman's ear, and he should get as near as possible, cheering the others on. In this way the pack can be kept to the line of their hunted fox and a change avoided, which will assuredly happen if they are allowed to wander. It matters little what notes on the horn are used or what sounds are made by voice if all are equally distinct and hounds know the meaning of each. If the same tones are used for cheering hounds on to a line as are used when encouraging them to draw,

it is not surprising they should be slow in responding to the former. Hounds have a musical ear and a discord by horn or voice is much the same to them as a rate.

When a fox is found a cheer helps to get hounds together and lessens the chance of dividing. The moment a "holloa away" is sounded the huntsman should get to the point of exit as quickly as possible with special notes of horn and voice. On arrival at where the fox has left and with three or four couples on the line he should go away at once and not wait for the stragglers, but by keeping the horn going the others will quickly join up. Never wait a moment for hounds either when going away with a fox or drawing a covert blank, as they hate to be lost or left behind. Perhaps a minute or two may be allowed after a blank draw for the hounds furthest away, but if the huntsman always waits outside till the pack is complete, some members of it will get into the habit of dawdling. The call on these occasions should be entirely different to when a fox has gone away, a long note on the horn is the usual intimation to come away without the need for flying.

The majority of huntsmen have definite ideas as to the part of a covert in which they are likely to find a fox, and although they may be frequently right they are liable to miss the chance of a run by not trying the unlikely portion. It is very annoying to covert owners and keepers to hear a fox has gone away when hounds have drawn blank. Every portion should be drawn carefully and thoroughly.

In the late afternoon the drag of a fox on the way to his kennel has generally faded away, and if he does not move there is no scent to indicate his location, so that hounds may pass within a few yards without winding him.

When meets are fixed it is, of course, impossible to foretell in what quarter the wind may blow, but if feasible it is always better to draw down wind coverts first and those farthest away from kennels. In a book written some twenty-five years ago (*Hunting, Haddon Hall Library*), I wrote that small coverts should be drawn down wind and woodlands the reverse way. My reason was that a fox would hear his enemies coming and would not be likely to be caught asleep in a small covert, whereas in a large wood he might get a long start.

This still appears to me the right method, but when the book was published I had a very kind and appreciative letter from that excellent sportsman, the late Mr. George Foljambe, and his only criticism was this point of drawing small coverts down wind. He said that a fox always made a sharp turn when first disturbed from his kennel and consequently drawing down wind he would turn up-wind into the jaws of the pack. Although I had the greatest respect for the fox-hunting knowledge and experience of Mr. Foljambe, his reasoning on this matter did not convince me.

The fascinating science of hunting a fox presents many strange problems, the solution of which will always give students food for much thought and reflection. There is not scope in this article to deal fully with the subject, but in addition to the few hints already given it will not be out of place to repeat that even the greatest experts may learn something from close observation.

Besides following his hounds in the field a huntsman has many other duties to perform in the kennel, and it is on the way they are carried out that much of his ultimate success will hinge. The most important of all is in having his hounds in perfect condition from the moment he starts cub-hunting. A moderate pack in

good condition will achieve better results than a better one only half fit. Long and very slow exercise is the best foundation for fast work in the last week or two. The subject of exercise was gone into rather thoroughly in these pages last year.

In the larger establishments where there is hunting four and six days a week, it is customary to keep a feeder, whose chief duty is to cook and prepare the food, but however good this man may be the huntsman is very unwise not to superintend the feeding himself. It is only the man hunting hounds who can gauge the quantity that each may consume to give the best results. Some appear to digest quicker than others and consequently can be allowed rather longer at the trough. A huntsman will watch his hounds at the beginning of a day, in the middle and at the end, making mental notes the while as to their ability to run up either from an over-loaded stomach or debility. It is impossible for a hound to use his nose if his sides are heaving and he is panting for breath, which is more often than not the cause of checks after a ten or fifteen minute sharp burst. A pack out of condition may hunt well enough at a slow pace, but when there is scent enough to go really fast, it will soon come to a stop. You hear someone say on those occasions: "What a funny thing hounds should have checked, because after a few minutes' interval they picked up the line exactly where they stopped."

A pack of hounds kept in a kennel require unremitting attention to ensure them being in good health, and the slightest slackness or neglect will soon become apparent in their appearance. Parasites that can be seen and others that are invisible multiply very rapidly if not scotched at any early stage. In even the best regulated

kennels these pests will occasionally be found, and if allowed to increase will cause skin troubles that are difficult to eradicate. All these things are matters for which a huntsman is responsible.

Then early in the winter he has his mating to arrange, followed by the arrival of whelps, and they require the greatest care.

Whelps should be watched daily from the moment they are born and should they show signs of losing puppy flesh should be induced to lap milk. Every whelp should be dressed and dosed for worms before it goes out to walk. The men who walk them are often blamed for their puppies coming in covered with mange, but in nine cases out of ten it is the fault of the huntsman for sending them out not dressed.

Whilst hunting is still going on and whelps are continuing to arrive, the puppies will be coming back from walk and it is often the care they receive at this period which builds up the strength to withstand distemper. Again, it is the huntsman's business to see these young hounds are well looked after, even though he may be hunting most of the day.

Taking all things into consideration I consider a huntsman who conscientiously performs all duties, lives a very strenuous life, and earns every penny the most generous employer may pay him. No one could be found in these days to do the work if it was not for the love of sport.

Hounds may have to leave kennels at eight o'clock on a morning when the meet is distant and not get back again until seven or eight at night. Yet the huntsman has many things to do before he dons boots, breeches and scarlet coat, whilst he may have several letters to write on his return. Although his breakfast

is at what leisured people would call an unearthly hour, he will probably never get a moment all day except for time to chew a crust of bread. Small wonder that drink should have been the ruin of many huntsmen's reputation. Spirits on an empty stomach are, as every one knows, bad for the health, but it is difficult to digest a meal in the saddle that has been hurriedly bolted, and it is therefore not surprising men should crave for a glass of whiskey on their way home. The one glass might not do much harm, but I fear in time it often leads to many more.

Although done with the best intentions and with the idea of being hospitable, it is really no kindness to offer hunt servants strong drink on their way home. A cup of tea with a slice of bread and butter would keep them going until they could sit down to their evening meal and leave no bad results.

In my humble opinion there has never been a huntsman to equal Tom Firr and future generations will be lucky if they discover one as good. Fate dealt kindly with me in giving me the privilege of hunting with and watching this great exponent of the science. Although he was an ideal man for a grass country in the marvellous manner he could get hounds out of covert and away on the back of their fox, you would see him towards the end of a run let them patiently puzzle out the line. In addition to his many fine qualities he was endowed with a voice that would thrill the most phlegmatic of men, and his cheer had an electric effect on the pack. The Quorn hounds had a great reputation, but I feel sure he would have quickly converted any pack of modest pretensions to equal excellence.

"Blood" is very necessary after a run and hounds that have not killed for some time will soon lose the

power of finishing a hunt. The beaten fox's scent weakens and the moment when the pack out of blood should redouble its efforts, it slackens off. Hounds may hunt as well as ever, but they lack the determination and drive to run up to their fox. It is then a huntsman must instil his own perseverance and he is justified in taking every opportunity of accomplishing a kill. Hounds in blood will kill their fox without assistance, but those that have been unfortunate for a considerable period must be helped in every way.

Personally, I am very doubtful if there is anything achieved by a kill when there has been no run. Hounds always appreciate a kill more if they feel they have accomplished it by their own unaided efforts, and they always hunt better if they have found the fox. The first fox away is usually the best, and it is advisable to get away with him, but when hounds have settled to one and are running him hard, it is usually a mistake to stop them. Every fox has a different scent, and it is desirable for success that a pack should acquire the habit of sticking to the scent it first finds.

The few hints in this article are known to most huntsmen, but they may be useful to beginners.

In conclusion, I should like to add that those who read the above will understand a huntsman's life is not easy, and who, having enjoyed the benefit of his labours, could show their gratitude by subscribing to the Hunt Servants' Benevolent Society.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

THE WHIPPER-IN.

THE above is the correct name and old-fashioned sportsmen considered the use of the abbreviation "whip" as applied to the man, was an offence against good taste. However, it has become in such general use of late, that it will be as well to use it in this article. Let it therefore be understood in writing "whip" I am not referring to the instrument of whalebone, lash and thong, but the man whose duty it is to assist the huntsman.

A good whip does not always make a capable huntsman but if he is observant, has the confidence to act on his own initiative, and has a love of sport, he should acquire much knowledge in the lower position. Perhaps there are more qualities required in the really efficient whip than in a huntsman. First of all he must remember to be a loyal assistant to the huntsman and never at any time to attempt to usurp that individual's duties. This to one who may be a born huntsman, is very trying, but he must have sufficient control to curb his natural propensity and wait for the day when he gets promotion.

The good whip is an invaluable aid to the huntsman but the bad would be very much better at home, and can do a great deal of harm. In the endeavour to be smart some whips like to drive the pack into as small a compass as possible, a very unnecessary proceeding, except when passing through traffic or a body of horsemen.

A whip must be a good rider with the nerve to jump big fences when required ; but the most important thing of all is to keep his eyes open and be ever on the alert. He should be watching hounds and huntsman at the same time, so that he can anticipate the latter's wishes before they are expressed.

A voice tuneful and melodious, that is of great service to a huntsman, may easily prove a curse to a whip. The owner thereof likes to hear himself and takes every opportunity of using his gift, forgetting the golden rule that the only voice hounds should hear is the huntsman's. I have seen a pack at a check stop their search and listen to a noisy whip bringing in a few stragglers. Perhaps the best advice to give a whip would be " keep your eyes and ears open but your mouth shut." The whip viewing a fox away may be allowed to give tongue to announce the fact, but he should shut his mouth directly the huntsman appears, allowing him with horn and cheer to get the pack on to the line.

It might be as well to begin at the beginning and go through an ordinary day's hunting. If the huntsman is otherwise engaged, the whip and feeder may have to walk out the pack that is to hunt another day. There will probably be many other duties to perform before starting for the meet, but the procedure varies in different kennels. With most fashionable packs it is the custom to have both a first and second whip, but

many provincial hunts have to be satisfied with one and appear to manage very well. The first has to follow the huntsman and be ready at any moment to turn hounds, but in many countries the second is also expected to follow the fortunes of a hunt over the fences. If the second is suitably mounted and he happens to be on the side of a covert a fox breaks, whilst the other is on the further side, it is advisable he should go on with the huntsman, but this is a matter in the hands of the master or huntsman, and depends on the orders they give.

Let us hark back a moment as we have not yet reached the meet and the journey there is important. The first whip rides in front and the second behind. Except in traffic and going through towns or villages, hounds should be allowed plenty of room and not be bunched up together. The huntsman will of course set the pace, which should be slow, but not having eyes in the back of his head, he cannot see what his second whip is doing. That functionary should be careful not to hurry hounds and unless one attempts to stray from the road, should give them ample space. Something with a strong and savoury odour might tempt one to leave the ranks, but hounds know when they are going hunting and are eager to get on.

Although it is probably over twenty hours since they were fed, many will not have evacuated all food, and it is necessary this operation should not be interfered with by a too zealous whip. Let it be understood, a hound should look on a whip as a friend and not as an individual of whom he is in constant fear. It is only when he has committed some offence that he should feel the lash and be conscious for what he is being

punished. Of course discipline is necessary and a hound that ignores an order when it is accompanied by his name must receive the penalty for disobedience. Even on these occasions a whip should exercise his discretion, and give the blow according to the temperament of the individual. Some shy and nervous hounds will be fully punished with the slightest smack, whilst others treat a sharp cut as a thing to be avoided, but which does not affect their spirits in the least. A hound of five or six seasons should very rarely be touched, as if he has been kept thus long, he must be good in his work and having developed character with age, resents very strongly being hit, more particularly if he knows he has committed no grave offence.

At the meet the whips may be allowed to keep the pack together, as it is when waiting that hounds are apt to stray from the fold. On roads going to covert the same rules apply as when journeying to the meet and should be carefully observed. At this moment strict masters see that none of the field get in front of the second whip.

On arriving at a covert the whips should see that no hounds break away until the huntsman has given them permission. Both aids will have been told beforehand where to go and each on reaching his appointed spot must take up a position that commands an uninterrupted view, from which he should not move his gaze for a second. If as may happen, one of the field should accompany him, he should refuse to be drawn into conversation and politely request the talkative one not to utter a word. If a good position close to a covert is obtained and a whip has not made a sound, a fox will go away almost under his horse's nose oblivious of the watcher's proximity.

What happens next may have an important bearing on the fortunes of a hunt. Getting away as quickly as possible after a fox is certainly of great importance, but no sound should be made until the varmint has a clear field's start, or otherwise the holloa may induce him to turn back. Personally I am all in favour of the whistle on these occasions as it is a signal to huntsman as well as hounds and not being as alarming as the human voice to a fox can be used sooner. A whistle may be blown when a fox has gone a couple of hundred yards and may be supplemented later by the voice.

On a stormy day with half a gale blowing, it is almost impossible for the whip on the down wind side to make either hounds or huntsman hear. When that is the case, he would save his voice and much time by galloping off at once to the huntsman. If the man viewing the fox away is in sight of the huntsman and can signal him by holding up his cap, he should keep his mouth shut as it is in the interest of hounds that they should hear only the voice of the man hunting them. A whip would be equally efficient if dumb, but should never be deaf.

Perhaps I have been rather drastic in condemning a whip's possession of a good voice, because it usually means a good ear, which enables a man to modulate his tones with varied inflections, each having its separate meaning. The owner of a raucous voice with no ear to correct his infirmity, is unable to make hounds distinguish the difference between a rate for some offence and an encouragement to get on.

The hearing of hounds is very sensitive so that it enables them to appreciate the slightest change, which is a point a whip would do well to remember. One hound may have been farthest away when the fox

departed and though straining every effort to reach the front, he must necessarily be at a disadvantage for the first field. The thoughtless whip, although seeing this unfortunate member of the pack is doing his best, will rate and flog him as if a serious offence had been committed. No hound worth his porridge ever wants to be left behind and is only too anxious to reach his comrades ; but if on occasion he happens to be late joining up and gets a severe cut with the lash, he will in future stop and dodge when hearing a horseman approaching. The instrument of punishment carried by the whip should only be used with the greatest care. Whip cracking is a habit I dislike and does great harm to shy or nervous hounds.

The pack have settled to the line, every member of it is up, a fact the first whip has ascertained by counting and passes the knowledge on to the second whip on his rejoining. If any are missing the latter had better go back at once, as they may have been running another fox, but it is unnecessary to stop long and perhaps the best plan is to ride round the up-wind side of the covert so that those left can hear. It is a great mistake for either huntsman or a whip to wait for hounds. Give them the chance of hearing "gone-away" and keep moving on. As I have said before the second whip bringing on tail hounds should do it with as little noise as possible.

With two really good whips, well mounted and capable riders, I like to see one on either side of the huntsman and not too close. They will then be in positions where they will be able to act promptly and efficiently. If the huntsman wishes to cast to the right the one on the left will turn the pack and *vice versa*. A good huntsman will swing his pack in front of him

without the need of much assistance, but the foxhound likes to get on, and the swing may be a little bit wider than the man hunting wants. The whip should never attempt to break the curve, but should make it bend—not with any whip cracking, only riding round the outside of the curve. This is the moment when the whip should perform his duties in complete silence and it is by his actions at this period that his capabilities can be judged.

When the huntsman goes to a holloa, the whip should be careful to guard the side from which the fox has come, as hounds are quite likely to hit the heel-way, when much valuable time will be lost. Hounds out of blood seem to prefer hunting heel-way, but with a bad scent any pack may do it. A discordant note on the horn will stop them some times, but the whip should never leave it to chance. Probably everyone has seen occasions when the huntsman has seized what seemed a golden opportunity of getting close to his fox, only to have it neutralized by the pack hitting the scent heel-way. A whip who knows his business will be in position to prevent this happening without any warning from the huntsman, but should the pack hit heel-way he ought not to rate them as if they had committed a crime, a crack of the whip and a walking “ware-heel” is usually sufficient to emphasize the error.

One warning I omitted when a fox is holloaed away, and that is, should a couple or two couple get away before the body of the pack they should be held up until the others reach them or at least until the huntsman arrives on the scene. Five couple may be allowed to go and if they have plenty of tongue, the rest will soon join them. One hound getting away by itself has ruined many a promising hunt. Every huntsman has

his own method on these occasions, but personally I think it is the best plan to send a whip in pursuit of the hound, and not allowing the others to get on the line, to gallop them forward. Scent of hound and fox get mixed up, and if a pack is allowed to hunt this double scent, the younger members are liable to develop the trick of cur-hunting, a habit which may take some trouble to eradicate.

Except on very rare occasions checks must occur in the course of a run, and if the pack in finishing their cast do not obey the huntsman's behest in his endeavour to recover the line, the whip must put them on. It may be a cur has chased the fox, or a flock of sheep wheeled across the scent, or again it may be a piece of bare fallow with the promise of better ground beyond. In any of these events the huntsman neither wants hounds to puzzle out the line, nor to cast them, but desires to lift them forward, so that the whip must hurry them on.

The mistake which the ignorant whip makes is in not recognising the different methods to employ when hounds are being cast or lifted. When a huntsman is casting his hounds, he is drawing them over ground on which he thinks it likely they will recover the scent, and if they are not then allowed to put their heads down for a second it is impossible for them to find the lost clue. This is a time when a whip should be extra careful not to hurry the pack, and if he notices some reliable old stager feathering, he may be left to investigate further and the fact reported to the huntsman. The intelligence should be conveyed quietly with the name of the hound and then the huntsman can act as he thinks best.

Speaking of hounds feathering brings to mind an error which many amateur and some professional whips are inclined to make. They notice a hound feathering where they have previously seen a hare, pheasant or partridge run and immediately begin to rate. By using a little commonsense they would realise that feathering only means that the hound has found a scent and is trying to discover what animal has left it. Unless the hound speaks to the line, he should never be rated and then only if there can be no possible doubt. Hares and foxes will use the same means, whilst both will take advantage of a firm track in wet weather, so that even though a hare has been seen to go the exact line which hounds run, it does not follow the fox has not preceded her.

On really bad scenting days, it is naturally more difficult to distinguish the difference in various scents and the Solomons of the pack should be given time to find out. Of course the culprit caught in the act of chasing a hare should have a taste of the lash and be rated, but it is inadvisable for a whip to act on his own initiative because he *thinks* a hare is being hunted. He can inform the huntsman what he has seen and leave that individual to decide the knotty point.

Hounds which are steady enough in the open will take advantage of being hidden in covert to indulge a taste for riot. The whip who is posted at a covert side to view a fox away will do no good and probably harm by yelling himself hoarse at the delinquents. Riot is much more likely to occur in woodlands than in thick gorse coverts and when it does occur there is really nothing to be done.

In large woods I like to see the first whip accompany the huntsman whilst he is drawing, not in his pocket,

but in an adjoining ride or ahead, though never out of hearing. Should riot then occur he will be able to act promptly, when without uttering a word he must catch the ringleader, give him a smart cut with the lash and rate him by name afterwards. It need hardly be said there is no variation or exception to the rule, "punish first and then rate."

With a huntsman who never deceives them and who has won their affection, hounds are usually quick to obey his orders, but should one unruly member heed not the voice of authority when called by name, the whip must take a hand at once. The huntsman should never have to call a hound by name more than twice, and should the order be disregarded the whip should go with all speed and as silently as possible behind the disobedient one, hit him smartly and rate him.

Under no circumstances should a hound be hit after he has regained the sheltering protection of the huntsman, unless of course the whip is given orders to do it. If the offence happens to be chasing sheep or some really serious crime, it is best to couple the offender to a rail and give him a sound thrashing; but this, of course, must only be done by the huntsman's express order and under his eye. Punishment should never be inflicted unless the delinquent is able to understand and realise for what he is being punished.

This is a slight digression from the moment when we had come to a check in the middle of a run, but I am just setting down hints as they occur to me and readers must shuffle them into their right places. A check is frequently a time when a change occurs and the whips must keep a sharp look-out. In a country where the coverts are disturbed frequently, foxes lie in hedge-rows and open fields, and on hearing the pack they move

away and the fresher scent has a stronger appeal.

If hounds divide it must be left to the huntsman to make up his mind which is the right line, and whatever a whip may think he must concentrate on stopping the division his superior considers wrong. Should he have caught a view of the fox and seen that it is undoubtedly the hunted one, he must still stop the lot which have not gone with the huntsman and then gallop at top speed to inform that functionary.

Should a portion of the pack get away on another fox and is practically beyond hearing of the horn, it is the second whip's duty to stop it and return the truant division to the main body with all possible speed. Although it is comparatively easy to cause a check by over-riding, it is sometimes very difficult to stop hounds when running hard with a good scent. They know quite well the fox has gone on and cannot understand why they should not be allowed to continue in pursuit. The usual method is to get in front of them and crack a whip, but if there are five or six couples, one hound will dodge aside, and getting on to the line again, will soon have the others after him. It must be remembered the whip has not only to stop this division, but to get them to follow him afterwards. Much depends on circumstances and the character of the ground, but often the better plan is to ride them off the line and then when a sufficient distance away to get to their heads and with encouraging voice induce them to follow. By this method they think man and horse are helping them and do not realise they are off the line until too late to regain it. On the other hand when a horseman gets directly in front of them they know he is there to deprive them of their fun and will naturally try to evade him. It is a matter that must be left to the

commonsense of the individual whip for which no hard and fast rule can be laid down.

For the first thirty minutes of a run unless the pace has been exceptionally fast, there is very little for either whip to do except keep their eyes open. The huntsman closely watching his hounds has little opportunity for looking ahead and therefore may miss seeing the sheep-cur some three fields away returning to his master with tongue hanging out. The obvious conclusion is that he has chased the fox and when hounds check at that point the observant whip can report what he saw. Hounds running down wind may disturb stock some distance away, but when a flock of sheep is seen to wheel and then stop to stare, it is fairly safe to assume they are looking at a fox. Their attitude then will often guide the whip's eyes in which direction to look.

The time arrives when according to pace and distance the fox should be getting tired. This is the moment for the second whip to prove his worth and at the same time acquire knowledge that will assist him in after life as a huntsman. The shifts and wiles of a beaten fox are very numerous.

With the permission of his superior the second whip will gallop on forward and try to get a view of the varmint. Once having viewed him he must never let him out of sight, but riding a parallel course and not directly behind. He must signal with his cap and not holloa or frighten the fox, though when a whistle is carried it may be used. Should a beaten fox crawl into a hedge-row and lie down he should be left undisturbed until hounds arrive. Hounds that have been killing fairly often and are well in blood, require little aid of this kind to accomplish their end, but those that have been out of luck for some time, may have all

the assistance it is possible to give. A smart second whip can then be of great value to a huntsman.

When running into a neighbouring country or where it is pretty certain the earths will not be stopped, the second whip must try and anticipate the sanctuary the fox has in view in order to get there first.

I am happy to say that hunt servants are a very good class of men and being sportsmen themselves they realise it is their duty to be courteous to those who employ them and to the field. As a rule they are on excellent terms with the farmers, but should one of these men, who are the backbone of hunting, do something to annoy a hunt servant he must bottle up his anger and "turn the other cheek" with a smile.

A whip should take care of horses he is given to ride and the better the horse the greater the care. If the master sees the whip does not abuse his horses, does not jump unnecessary fences, and nurses them in heavy going, he will be more likely to entrust him with better class animals. However good and bold a rider a whip may be, he should remember the master is paying and mounting him to attend on hounds—not for his own amusement.

Young and irresponsible members of the field will often try to induce a whip with a reputation for riding, to lark over fences, but if he allows himself to be tempted he will soon be looking out for another place. The master who puts his whips on horses that require making, is of course pleased to see them jumping as often as possible, but he cannot expect under those circumstances for the huntsman to be properly served.

A whip who desires to get on in his profession and looks forward to some day becoming a huntsman, should take every opportunity of acquiring knowledge

appertaining to the details of hound management. If there is an old and experienced feeder, a young whip with a little diplomacy and an offer of help may learn many valuable hints as to the cooking of food, medicines, etc., which will come in useful later on. A man who was really keen on his job might do worse than spend his annual holiday for a couple of years with a veterinary surgeon who specialised in dogs. The temperature of various diseases, assisting a bitch in a difficult case of whelping, the proper method of setting a broken limb and many other things might be learnt with advantage.

Unless a man is very keen on the sport and is not afraid of hard work, he should never become a hunt servant to a pack of foxhounds.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

THE FOX.

THERE is something in the sight of a wild fox stealing across a ride with a whisk of his brush, or sailing boldly away over the open that stirs the pulse and gladdens the eye. Why it is that the same animal in captivity or partly tamed does not excite a like interest it is hard to explain.

To quote Mr. Jorrocks, in one of his sporting lectures, "Oh! how that beautiful word fox gladdens my 'eart. In the summer I loves him with all the hardour of affection; not an 'air of his beautiful 'ead would I hurt; but when the hautumn comes, then dash my vig, 'ow I glories in pursuing of him to destruction. And yet it ar'n't that I loves the fox less, but that I loves the 'ound more."

Yes! it is the truth of that last paragraph—having a greater love for the hound than for the fox—which is the essence of hunting. Every really good sportsman is kind at heart and a lover of animals, so that really to enjoy the chase his sympathies must always be with the hounds.

Of course, it is impossible to gauge the feelings of a hunted fox, but personally I am quite certain from observation during many years that until the last few

minutes he always expects to escape. A cub that has never been hunted previously would naturally be alarmed at the cry of hounds, but an old fox is confident in his inherited cunning and acquired knowledge and starts off with the implicit belief in his ability to outwit his pursuers. This confidence is frequently misplaced, and an honourable death is the result, but that particular animal being no longer alive, can no longer benefit by the experience, and is unable to pass it on to others of the tribe.

Foxes look on a hunt as a game in which they pit their stamina and brains against hounds' noses and a huntsman's skill. Of course, they know that the penalty for being a loser is death, but that only adds interest and excitement to the contest. In proof of the argument that foxes are not the timid and badly frightened animals when pursued by hounds that some people seem to think, is the fact that on many occasions, on poor scenting days, they have been seen to pick up a hen and walk off with it, the hunt being only a few fields distant. A fox lives by hunting and knows quite well when scent is favourable or otherwise, so that if his own nose tells him it is bad, he feels safe in laughing at his enemies and taking it easy. Sometimes his calculations may be upset by an enterprising second whip anticipating the route he would take and galloping forward to view him, but that is risk that the too venturesome must incur in playing with danger.

In running up-wind, foxes as a rule are making for some earth or drain which they know well, and go straight for their objective without hesitation; but those starting off down wind usually stop at intervals to listen if hounds are still on their line, and can judge pretty well by the cry whether it is needful to hurry or

not. An experienced fox, when once he has got a few fields ahead of the pack, will keep going at a steady pace that will neither tire his limbs nor exhaust his lungs, but will enable him to increase his lead every minute if scent is not too good. A check, however short, when the huntsman has to cast hounds, will mean the loss of at least two or three minutes, in which time the fugitive will gain the same number of fields. This is the explanation of why runs that seemed promising at the start, get slower and slower until finally fading away to nothing.

If hounds get away close to their fox, and can keep at him for ten or fifteen minutes without a moment's respite, he will soon be gasping for air, which his overstrained lungs will be unable to supply. Then it is the panting fugitive must depend on his wits to evade the impending doom, and by dodging tactics gain temporary relief in order to recharge with oxygen. A continuation of the straight course under these conditions would inevitably lead to disaster, and a favourite subterfuge, after going through a fence for some yards into the field beyond, is to double back and run at a right angle to the previous direction under shelter of the hedge. The pace at which hounds were running, and their drive, would carry them far beyond the turning point, when, if Reynard is able to escape watchful human eyes, he can lie down and recover his wind. The usually sound hunting rule of "always cast forward" is, on an occasion of this kind, likely to favour the hunted, and be the means of allowing him to go free. Hounds, if any good, would, on finding no scent forward, have swung back to the point they last touched it, but a hard riding field would effectually prevent them doing that, and thus a fox is often able to save his life.

Probably very few of those who go hunting realize how much the animal that is the source of their pleasure learns through the experience of three or four seasons. Although scientific people may affirm that animals are incapable of reason there are many who think otherwise, and amongst them will be found those who have made a life study of animals. The border line of instinct and reason is difficult to define.

The young of all animals, man included, begin with instinct, and reason develops later, generations of training in their forbears, combined with greater brain power, enable the children of man to outstrip the animals, but the latter acquire knowledge to a certain extent and reason on what they have learnt. It can be noted, and is undoubtedly a fact, that with the acquisition of knowledge instinct gradually weakens. This can often be observed with horses—or it might have been done when sportsmen rode their horses long distances home. The young horse that may never have been that way before will always turn his head in the direction of his stable, whereas the seasoned veteran seems to lose his sense of direction unless the road is familiar. The one depends on inherited instinct and the other, having dropped some of that power, is reduced to reason to solve the problem. Wild animals certainly retain their natural instinct longer than those that are domesticated, but the former learn wisdom with age and reason on what they learn, though whether their instinct also weakens it is impossible to say. My own opinion is that inherited instincts handed down through countless ages are implanted in the brain of the animal when born and it is nature's method of protecting the young until the brain is sufficiently developed to store the lessons of experience. My

sense of locality—only instinct—was very strong in youth, but has faded considerably with the lapse of years.

I will admit instinct teaches the fox that the cry of hounds is a danger signal, but it is reason which tells the veteran there is likely to be trouble for him when the hoof beats of numerous horses are heard in the distance. Unless there is a strong breeze blowing and the hunt approach the covert up-wind, the foxes therein are fully alive to the advance of their enemies. Foxes of experience that have often been hunted will take the hint and clear off before the hunt arrives, and unless a whip is sent on in advance, the covert will be blank, with only slight evidence of a stale line.

The wild fox probably dislikes the human smell as much or more than he does that of the hound, but with his keener sense of smell than ours he is able to distinguish the various scents of different individuals. He recognizes the smell of the man who looks after the covert and suffers that individual's presence near his kennel, whereas a stranger would scare him away at once. I will not say that a fox regularly inhabiting a certain covert considers the covert keeper a friend, but he knows he is not an avowed enemy, though it is possible he thinks it was an unfriendly act to stop the earth on a hunting morning when recognizing the familiar smell clinging to the faggots.

The usual time for cubs to be born is about the third week in March, but some arrive much earlier and a few later. Much depends on the weather before Christmas and in January. When it has been exceptionally mild the vixens come in use rather sooner. Nature has allotted the early spring as the best period for the cubs to come into the world, as by the time they are

two or three months old they make a heavy demand on the vixen and it is then there is generally a good supply of young rabbits. She cannot spare the time away from her young family to go long distances hunting for food, and young rabbits are easy to catch. The mother rabbit's custom of making a shallow hole in the open affords the vixen a ready opportunity of getting food, as she smells out the exact spot where the youngsters are lying and easily comes down on them.

The vixen is not always a faithful wife, unless her mate is a truculent individual and can fight off all aspirants to the lady's favour. There is, however, generally one husband who constitutes himself as the responsible parent of the family, and he it is who remains in the neighbourhood to assist the vixen in getting an abundant supply of food. It occasionally happens that he may get killed before the hunting season is over, and then the poor mother has a hard task to provide for the wants of a growing family.

When this occurs she is forced to raid neighbouring hen-roosts, and young lambs are sometimes sacrificed to fill her larder.

At about three months old the cubs will venture to the mouth of the earth and the vixen will then generally move them to a covert if there is one conveniently near. An earth in which a litter has been bred becomes rather foul in the course of time, and when there is no covert handy another earth will be found or perhaps a field of standing corn. The latter is a good place for the cubs, as there is plenty of room for exercise without venturing into the open and it is good practice for them hunting young rabbits.

When there is no sandy or gravel soil in which to make earths, the vixen will often have her family on

the top of the ground, and those are the foxes that afford the best sport, but the stub bred fox is rather rare nowadays. Perhaps this may be in part due to the increase in artificial earths. These may be aids to ensuring the finding of foxes in places which might otherwise be doubtful, but they spoil the breed, and have almost eliminated the straight-necked variety, whilst at the same time they are a frequent cause of mange.

How long the vixen would continue a mother's care for her offspring if cub hunting did not intervene, I cannot say, but it is probable the natural tie would be broken by the middle of September, even were not hounds to intervene. When the pack first visits a covert the vixen does all in her power to prevent her youngsters from falling victims to the huntsman's thirst for blood, but after that first experience they have to look after themselves.

Although foxes have a very thick and efficient coat to keep them warm, they usually prefer a kennel, if above ground, that is sheltered from the wind. Also, in spite of being nocturnal animals, delighting in the dark, they enjoy a little sunshine in autumn and early spring. A covert that has an open spot in its middle, well protected from the wind, and efficiently hidden from too curious eyes, is often selected for the mid-day sleep when the sun is shining. What, however, a fox insists on is dry bed, and this, strange to say, can frequently be found in marshy ground on a bunch of rushes. The rushes suck up all the moisture and afford dry lair. Another reason which I think is responsible for a marsh or bog being a favourite place is that neither men nor dogs can approach it without giving due notice of their approach.

Gorse is preferred, perhaps, to any other kind of plant as, however much it may rain, the ground beneath is always dry, but it has the objection that in a very strong wind it is continually moving. This a fox does not like, as in addition to his sense of smell he is dependant to a certain extent on his hearing for a warning of danger, which the continuous rustling of the gorse might drown. A supply of water within the covert is an advantage, because a fox usually wakes up two or three times during the day and often likes to have a drink, which is, of course, not feasible if he has to go outside for it.

With the increasing head of poultry kept and the number distributed over the fields, a great temptation is put in the fox's way to make an easy meal, and though he may kill one to eat, it must be admitted he frequently goes on killing for the lust of slaughter. These unorthodox items may occasionally help to assuage his hunger, but rats, mice and beetles form the chief staple of his diet. All of these have to be hunted for, which helps to keep a healthy fox fit and in good condition.

This hunting teaches a fox much that is useful to him when pursued by hounds and gives him an intimate knowledge of the country. By the delicate membranes of the nose he can analyse the various scents of different animals, and this gives him a shrewd idea of the link between himself and the hounds, when it is favourable or otherwise.

Turning down foxes should never be resorted to if it can possibly be avoided, and no one, landowner or otherwise, should turn a fox down unless he gets permission from the master. Farmers dislike turned down foxes, and nothing annoys them more than to hear it has been done.

CHAPTER NINE.

THE FIELD.

THE individuals, members or otherwise of a hunt, who come out to see the sport, and constitute what is called the field, have no direct responsibility in the hunting or management of the hounds, but the successful pursuit of foxes and their own fun depends very largely on how they behave. For this reason there seems ample excuse to introduce the subject of mere onlookers into this series of articles, which have hitherto been confined to technical hunting matters.

Man is a gregarious animal, we are told, and certainly when gathered in any number he frequently loses individuality and becomes a blind follower of the mad impulses that control a crowd's actions. Some sort of telepathy or thought transfer flashes from mind to mind, and ordinary reasonable beings are suddenly infected with mob fever. This must be the explanation of those occasions when, collectively, a field acts in a wild and disorderly manner, and which otherwise each separately would condemn. More often than not the first flight men and hard riders are responsible for these outbreaks, so that in a natural desire to get forward they should remember to set a good example to those behind, and control their own inclinations.

When hunting re-commenced after the war there were probably many newcomers in the field who had little experience of the sport or of the unwritten laws that should govern the conduct of those following it. These may have unwittingly tried the patience of various masters, but they have now acquired knowledge and refrain from committing further indiscretions. With this period excepted, I think the general tendency of most fields is to a gradual improvement in sportsmanlike and rational behaviour. Much of this is due to the early training of boys and girls, who every year may be seen in increasing numbers at the covert-side.

In the interesting memoirs of Mr. Osbaldeston, published in the *Field*, it will be noticed that unruly crowds were more common in the early part of the last century than they are now. Such an instance as the one the author quotes, when the whole field set off to ride after the fox, has no parallel in these days. In extenuation of such unseemly conduct in those days it may be as well to explain the probable cause. The fame of Melton, with its surrounding pastures as ideal for riding over, had spread abroad. The hard riders of various provincial countries, when blessed with sufficient means went to Melton, not for the sport they expected to enjoy, but to compete against the thrusters whose reputation for desperate riding had become the theme of sporting writers. Hunting at the beginning of the century was only just rising to be a fashionable amusement, and although country squires, content to remain at home, had kept hounds for generations the fops wasting their time in London rather looked down on the sport. A few men with the love of hunting and adorned with titles suddenly made it a fashionable craze, so that many of the idle rich decided

that riding across Leicestershire was the right thing to do. The majority of them had never learnt the first rudiments of hunting, had no knowledge of hounds, and were only concerned in beating other competitors over the fences. It was this spirit of competition that caused the unpleasant episode in Mr. Osbaldeston's mastership of the Quorn mentioned above.

Hunting is really strenuous work, and those who follow it must be prepared often to endure considerable hardship, so that a real and abiding love of the sport is necessary to keep a man faithful.

In Mr. Osbaldeston's time there were doubtless many thorough sportsmen in different parts of England who would have been horrified at seeing a field set off to ride after a fox without waiting for hounds, and we must not, therefore, imagine it was a common offence of those days. I do, however, believe that latterly hunting knowledge has become more general; also there are more people who appreciate and take an interest in the work of hounds. I think we may take it that whereas in the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century, hunting knowledge was confined solely to dwellers in the country, it has nowadays spread over a much wider sphere and achieved popularity with all classes.

Much of this is due to the hunting literature of the past, and Surtees' immortal *Handley Cross* is probably responsible for awaking the divine spark of the chase in the hearts of many who would otherwise have gone to their graves ignorant of life's greatest joy. Jorrocks' references and quotations from Beckford must have made numerous readers dig up that ancient classic, *Thoughts on Hunting*, perusal of which could not fail to light a fire of enthusiasm in those with any hunting instincts.

The increased interest which the present generation now takes in hunting, apart from the pleasures of riding, is a healthy sign, and a hopeful promise for sport in days to come. In spite of the gloomy pessimists who can see only bright spots in the past, and an end to hunting altogether in the near future, it seems to me that fox-hunting is every day establishing a firmer hold in the country. Of course, there always will be, as there have been in the past, a few miserable cranks who "compound with sins they are inclined to by damning those they have no mind to," and, having no love of sport, wish to deny others any pleasure therein.

These selfish individuals usually base their complaints on humane grounds, but as a rule they have no love for animals, and are generally of the kind that would kick a dog if it got in their way.

Although Mr. Osbaldeston gave Meltonians a very bad character in his day, there was a marked improvement later on, and from 1880 up to the outbreak of war the fields attending Quorn, Cottesmore and the Belvoir were the most orderly in the country. Melton, as of yore, still attracted the hardest riders, and the spirit of competition was not altogether absent, but as a rule a word of warning from the master was generally sufficient to curb the most exuberant. The difficulty was, as it was bound to be, that the master could only be in one place at once, and with a big field, although he would be able to control one flank, he would be too far away to have any influence on the other. It does sometimes happen, then, that those who are old enough to know better, finding themselves beyond the sphere of authority, behave like irresponsible boys. A little reflection would convince them that the master has no desire to limit their pleasure, and the orders he gives are for their ultimate benefit.

The master has many arduous duties, and it is only with the loyal co-operation of his field that he is able to perform them. Perhaps the most important of these is to see that the minimum of damage is done to fences or crops of the man over whose land the hunt passes. Every member of the field can help and do his share. No one expects a man well placed in the middle of a good run to go out of his way to shut a gate, but when the same man is too far behind to be considered a serious competitor, or hounds are only hunting slowly, he should be always ready to do small services for our good friends the farmers. A gate shut at the right moment may often save the farmer or his men many tiresome hours' search for lost stock. In the case of sheep scared by hounds and the galloping horses, the field should always endeavour to get on one side or the other of the flock, which will then wheel intact clear away from the direction the hunt is proceeding. Failure to do this frequently means a very heavy loss to the farmer and a stiff claim on the hunt funds. Let it be understood, however, that there are many farmers who never send in a claim, and I can hardly believe anyone would cause such good sportsmen unnecessary loss.

What usually happens when one of these regrettable incidents occurs is that some thoughtless or ignorant person, seeing the bulk of the field going carefully to one side of the sheep, notices the other side is the shortest route to his objective—usually a gate. Heedless of the consequences, he charges down and drives the sheep into the main body of horsemen; then the flock, if not scattered, will rush for the gateway, which will speedily be jammed with a woolly, panting mass. Some, in their terror, will dash about amongst the horses' legs and get kicked. This is a scene I have often witnessed in the

past, and is bound to occur again unless those who go hunting will be a little more thoughtful.

In the heat of a run it is impossible to remember actually where any particular fence has been broken, but occasionally an individual will recall having smashed a gate or cleared out a flight of rails. If he would take the trouble to pay the owner a visit on his way home, or the following day, and give the local carpenter orders for instant repair, he would be doing much more good than represented by the small sum out of pocket. Farmers appreciate these attentions, and are always willing to forgive those who are anxious to make amends for any damage they may have done. Most hunts now set aside a certain amount for the repair of fences, but as the farmer has first of all to send in a claim and the secretary to issue orders, there is usually some delay before the matter has been settled. The money for these repairs comes from the general funds, and is looked on as a matter of business, whereas when the actual culprit confesses his guilt and is ready to make good the damage at his own expense, a personal touch is added which creates a friendly feeling.

When the day is over, a generous meal consumed, and exciting incidents of the day weave themselves in the clouds curling from the fragrant weed, we live again the joyous moments. Who is there that has not ridden through a good run from the depths of an armchair and possibly bored his hearers with the details? In this mental reincarnation of the scene a man might easily recall any damage done and take the opportunity of having it repaired the following day.

There are many excellent sportsmen who follow hounds afoot, on bicycles, carriages, and, we regret to say, sometimes in motor cars; but it is only the horse-

men that constitute the field and are under the master's direct control. The cry of hounds, the sound of "Gone away," and the rush to secure a start, will rouse men to a pitch of ardent enthusiasm that is liable to make them forget all good resolutions. In the desire of everyone to be first there is danger of the pack being driven over the line, and it is therefore essential each member of the field should obey instantly the master's word of command. The master's position and authority depend entirely on the loyal allegiance of his field, so that whether he is right or wrong in the commands given, they must be accepted without question. In this way only can a field be kept in control and not become a disorderly crowd.

The field, however, should not always wait for the master's order to "Hold hard," but every individual with any experience of hunting ought to assist him by anticipating his wishes.

Landowners and farmers expect the field that ride over their land to be composed of gentlemen, a fact which every man that goes a-hunting should bear in mind. The man who holds a gate open or performs some other little office deserves a word of thanks, and loose silver should always be carried in the pocket to reward shepherds or agricultural labourers.

In the excitement of the chase men often lose their tempers and behave in a manner they would condemn in others. Failing nerve is frequently responsible for the feeling of irritation, which is apt to lead to foolish acts and violent words. In fact, it is generally safe to assume that the man who loses his temper in the hunting field has lost his nerve.

Hunting is a recreation, and we go out for the purpose of enjoying ourselves, which is in danger of being spoilt

by any unpleasantness that crops up, and which is liable to strain friendly feelings. Many things may happen in the course of a run : you may accidentally barge up against a man in a gateway, collide with someone jumping a fence through your horse swerving, and numerous other unforeseen incidents may occur ; but, however slight they be, apologies must be offered at once, which should be accepted in a generous spirit. We are all liable to offend unwittingly at some time, and ought therefore to act kindly to others who transgress. The good comradeship and the happy relations between all is the essence of hunting.

Within the scope of this article it would be impossible adequately to deal with all the unwritten laws which should govern a field's behaviour.

When riding from covert to covert, or at any time when hunting is not actually in progress, hounds should be given plenty of room, and if it is desired to have a word with the huntsman, it is an act of courtesy to ask the master's permission. Never at any time should more than one horseman ride alongside the huntsman, as otherwise the pack is unable to get near him.

Speculating on the covert to be drawn first is a bad habit, which is apt to grow, and a travelling fox is quick to take the hint of approaching horses, so that the chances of a good run may easily be spoilt by those indulging in this practice.

However much money the master may spend himself, there is usually a fund in every hunt to which the field are expected to contribute. The amounts vary with different packs. With some it is left to the generosity of the individual, and with others a minimum sum is fixed ; but those who go hunting should contrive to give as much as their means admit and not evade responsi-

bilities by subscribing the lowest limit. There are many expenses incidental to hunting—horses, fodder, and stable labour are heavy items nowadays ; but subscriptions should always have first call and be paid before bank balances have been drained by other sources.

Subscriptions are due on the first of November, and no one should feel happy in following a pack until he has sent his cheque to the secretary. The custom of putting off the payment for an indefinite period has become general, with the result that men sometimes find they have spent too much on stable expenses and have only a meagre sum left for the hunt funds. We are all rather inclined to put off payment of dues which do not demand instant settlement, and it might be to the advantage of all concerned if it became a rule that subscriptions should be paid at the commencement of the season.

The hounds and horses of a hunt establishment, it should be remembered, have to be kept the whole year round, and not only for the season. Those who come down for hunting when the season opens are dependent for their sport on the condition of the inmates of the hunt kennels and stables, which means a considerable outlay during the summer months. This expense is usually borne by those good sportsmen, the Masters, who consent to pay heavily for the position and the privilege of providing others with their sport.

Apart from the hunt establishment, there are many items in the management of a country that have increased largely in the last few years. Without statistics of the poultry kept in 1925 and in the years previous to the war, it can only be guessing to make a comparison, but I should estimate the numbers to be at least ten times more now than formerly. Foxes in some

districts seem to think these fowls are kept for their benefit, and help themselves liberally, with the result that hunt secretaries are faced with heavy bills, in some cases more than double what they were fifteen or twenty years ago. Repairing fences makes a serious inroad on available funds, as both material and labour have risen in price. Compensation for damage, covert rents, and a host of other claims have to be settled before hunting can proceed smoothly. Masters and secretaries must work hard to fulfil these obligations with the necessary tact, and the field being relieved of all responsibility, should respond liberally in the matter of subscriptions.

Kicking horses are a very serious danger out hunting, and those riding them must not imagine that a red ribbon on the tail absolves them from taking ordinary precautions. There are very few horses that cannot be cured of the habit by judicious punishment and the use of the voice. Some horses kick from nervousness and others from vice. A really bad kicker should never be the mount of an indifferent horseman. A gentle and continuous manipulation of the bridle is advisable when a horse, not above reproach, is in a crowded gateway. The rider, however, too intent on conversation to take notice, must not be surprised if the horse in front retaliates by kicking, because he has had his tail or quarters nibbled by the one behind.

In riding to hounds, the most important rule to observe is to keep a straight line, and should the fence immediately in front be unjumpable, it is only excusable to deviate from the straight path if at least ten good lengths ahead of the nearest man, so that your action does not oblige him to check his horse. Those to whom jumping a fence first and selecting a place is more than half the fun would generally do better not to change

their minds if the fence were possible. Horses have a curious intuition—probably conveyed by riders' hand or legs—of knowing the exact spot the man has chosen, and the moment he chooses it, so that if an alteration is made the horse loses confidence in the rider. In any ordinary sized enclosure a man ought to be able to select his point of exit the moment he lands in a field.

“Cutting in,” that is, going sideways at a fence or gap to get at which another is going straight, is an unpardonable sin, and should be classed as attempted manslaughter. In steeplechasing it is moderately safe to ride knee to knee, because the fence is the same height, but it is a practice deservedly unpopular in the hunting field, where fences usually vary every few yards. The majority of horses like to take the line of least resistance, and, seeing a gap a few yards right or left of a considerable obstacle confronting them, will often steer suddenly for the easier place. For this reason it is advisable to give men on either side a wide berth.

A man, in following another at a fence, should always allow sufficient room to pull up if his leader falls. There is no excuse for a man jumping on another. The distance to allow must, of course, depend on the horse and the time it takes to stop him, but no one riding a hard puller should ever accept the services of a pilot.

It is sometimes necessary to make use of gates, and a little education in the opening of them might prove useful to some of those who come out hunting.

To enable a crowd to pass quickly through a gateway it is important the gate should be kept open, and this can only be done if everyone on his way through puts out his hand or whip. This is only a matter of courtesy and politeness, a failure to do which is both selfish and thoughtless.

Dress is a matter on which I am very loth to offer an opinion, and will therefore leave it to the individual's taste or change of fashions. Hunting dress is, in reality, a uniform, and should therefore be governed strictly by the fashion of the particular hunt. Everyone going hunting should aim at being inconspicuous and conform to the taste of the period, a remark applying equally to men and women. Of course, elderly men may be allowed to wear their prehistoric garments in which they followed the chase before the present generation were born.

Fashions change each year in the cut of a coat, the shape of a tie and the colour of boot-tops, but a top-boot must never be worn without a spur—better guiltless of a rowel. In the matter of the position that buttons are fixed at breeches knees, fashion has ordained considerable change in my short span of life. My first recollection was for the best-dressed men to wear them on the outside of the knee, but they have gradually worked round to the inside, and in a few years' time will probably be relegated to the back and therefore out of sight.

This article does not pretend to be a full and complete manual of the manner in which a field should conduct itself, but is merely a reminder of a few things which most men already know, and by observance is conducive to harmony in the glorious sport of fox-hunting.

CHAPTER TEN.

FOX COVERTS.

THERE are many people who consider themselves experts on this subject, but few of them agree as to methods of planting or as to what makes the most satisfactory covert. All are entitled to hold their own opinions, and I am not setting myself up in opposition to them or posing as an authority, but shall merely give those who read these lines the benefit of what has come to me from experience and observation.

The fox is really the person who ought to be consulted, but he unfortunately cannot give us his advice, and the only way to ascertain his wishes is by carefully noting the spots he selects for a kennel. This is what I have endeavoured to do and if my conclusions prove to be wrong it is due to faulty observation.

Woods are frequently planted for timber, for shelter or ornament, and are not made exclusively to hold foxes, although they may frequently be certain finds. The coverts which I am going to consider firstly are those built for the express purpose of holding a fox

in an open country, and which are not too big for hounds to force an unwilling tenant to leave. Such a covert should not be less than four acres or more than twelve. In the case of the smaller size there should be no rides, and in the larger only two, cutting the covert into four equal quarters with gates at each end. The width of rides should not be more than six feet as otherwise it is an encouragement for unauthorized persons to use them for shooting rabbits. The gates also should be so placed that it is impossible to see the length of a ride from outside the covert, as otherwise foxes feel they have no privacy in crossing from one quarter to the other.

Here let me say a few words anent earths before going into further details. The artificial earth I very strongly condemn, although many people may disagree with me. They are a frequent cause of mange, encourage foxes to go to ground, and have been the direct cause of eliminating the stub-bred sort, which always showed the best sport. It is very natural that keepers, earth-stoppers and those in charge of coverts, not to mention the owners, should be anxious for hounds to find when they come. An earth in the covert when stopped at the right time, does certainly help to ensure a fox of some sort being there when wanted, but it more often than not frightens a real old traveller away. The earth stopper should do his work about mid-night and the mere fact of his presence together with the smell he leaves in the covert at that hour is enough to scare a veteran. Then it is not always realized the wisdom that foxes acquire with experience, and when they find an earth closed which is usually open, they know perfectly well the district is going to be dangerous for them.

In my humble opinion every earth ought to be permanently closed by the first of November, and kept religiously in that state until the middle of February, when those scratched out then may be left. This only in a country well stocked with foxes, as otherwise it is necessary to do everything to encourage them to remain in the district. A covert, however, of a fair size that is kept strictly quiet, free from dogs and poachers, is pretty certain to be tenanted if there is a fox within ten miles. If a vixen has herself been bred in an earth she will probably want to scratch out one for her coming family, and it is better the earths should be a field or two away from the covert, where she will move the cubs when old enough.

Foxes are, unfortunately, not over clean in their habits, and the result is that an earth occupied by them for any length of time becomes a very unhealthy spot—a certain breeder of mange. By forcing them to remain above ground during the hunting season the earths have a chance of getting sweet again, and this is helped by the foxes being obliged to scratch fresh entrances. Permanent stopping for the season is often made difficult by badgers, but at the same time they do good in cleaning out earths that have been made foul by foxes.

The M.F.H. cannot always do as he likes and must consider the wishes of covert owners, but when it is left entirely in his hands, he would do well to abolish artificial earths, allow none of any kind in covert and only natural ones outside.

The initial business in making a covert is to choose the site, and this must, of course, be governed to a certain extent by the fields available for the purpose in the district it is desired to command. If it is possible to

find a situation with a small stream running through it, a very important factor is gained, as although foxes prefer to wander some distance for their food, they like to have water close at hand. The slope of a hill facing south is ideal, but not essential if there is good protection from north and east winds.

The first species of covert to be discussed shall be gorse, as I consider that gives the driest and warmest lair for foxes, although it has the disadvantage of continual movement when exposed to the wind. Gorse requires a dry soil, and if there is the slightest sign of wet, trenches from eighteen inches to two feet deep should be dug as a preliminary. The ground should be ploughed shallow, about five inches, early in the winter and left to mellow with frost. If the field happens to be grass it would be best to use a skimming plough and remove the turf altogether. When the dry weather comes in spring the ground must be rolled and harrowed continuously—never touched when wet—until the soil is as fine as an onion bed. The seed can be drilled with an ordinary turnip drill and the best time is either the last week in April or first week in May. The drills should be from fifteen to eighteen inches apart so that there is room to hoe in between without disturbing the plants. It is of the utmost importance to the quick growth of gorse that it should be kept clean and free from weeds for the first two years, after that it will take care of itself. When sowing is completed the ground should be well rolled with a light roller, and after that is finished the seeds should be no deeper than an inch and a half below the surface. Perhaps it would be as well to add that should the soil, owing to its nature and dry weather, be loose to any depth, it should be well rolled before sowing in order

to make the ground firm. Select fine weather for sowing and the first rain will quickly germinate the seeds. I am not quite certain on this point, but am under the impression that gorse in its first leaf is subject to the turnip fly, but it should be carefully watched until reaching its normal appearance. If these details are carefully carried out there will be covert to hold a fox in three years. Remember that if the seed bed is rough and lumpy you cannot expect any success. No hoeing should be done until the gorse is in second leaf as the roots have not established a hold in the ground ; also, do not hoe too near the plants lest the soil becomes loose.

If the site is not enclosed a quick hedge should be planted round and protected with a post and rail fence. When the total enclosure is anything over six acres I should be inclined to encircle the gorse with a band of quick and privet about ten yards in width. Quick, the common term for plants, white thorn, or hawthorn, does not make a good covert by itself, but in conjunction with privet affords excellent shelter for foxes. The object of enclosing the gorse with this band is that it keeps out stray dogs when the gorse gets hollow underneath. The whole must be enclosed with wire netting and no rabbits allowed inside. The wire should be buried three or four inches in the ground to prevent them scratching under it, but can be removed altogether at the end of three years.

Much depends on the soil, the situation and the climate in the growth of gorse, but after seven or eight years it will begin to get lanky and hollow underneath. Should the covert be of sufficient size to permit the loss, one quarter should be cut down and burnt

occasionally, when it will be necessary to protect the burnt portion as before against rabbits.

If the gorse occupies only some three or four acres, and it is desired to put off as long as possible the day of cutting down, it should never be allowed to exceed four feet in height. A man clad in leather, covering his legs and up to the armpits, should get to work with splasher or garden shears taking off the tops and as far as possible trimming the sides. This should be done every year and the best time is about May. By periodical trimming the life of a gorse covert can be prolonged almost indefinitely, and the cutting down avoided, which would make it useless for two years as a home for foxes.

On heavy soil the most satisfactory plant is the blackthorn, and stooling freely as well as throwing up shoots from branching roots, it soon covers the ground. Like gorse and other young plants it should be kept free from weeds for the first two years, and can then be left alone. The best time for planting is about the middle of March or earlier if possible. The mistake is often made of planting too close. My own opinion is that three feet each way is quite close enough and allows room for the hoe to be kept going in the summer. By giving each plant plenty of room at the start, they become more vigorous and the roots have a better chance of getting a firm hold of the soil. In the second year it is a good plan to sow seeds of the strong rough grass which grows luxuriantly under shelter.

These grasses of which I think there are three or four kinds, can be supplied by any good seedsman and are beloved by foxes, but when the blackthorn is strong they do not make much headway. If the covert is big enough to afford the space it is a good

plan to leave a portion—about fifteen yards by ten—unplanted and sow thereon a mixture of these rough grasses. Although the fox is a nocturnal animal and soon gets distressed when forced to exert himself under a strong sun, he is very fond of a sun bath if it can be indulged in safely. When there is a spot of this kind in a covert it will invariably attract foxes on a sunny day provided the place is well sheltered from the wind.

I am rather hazy as to the number of times a fox moves from his kennel after returning from his night hunt and before starting out again the next evening, but imagine it is usually once or twice. A noon-day drink with a few minutes an hour or two later to stretch the muscles, is probably the ordinary routine of a wild fox. The outlier, and often outcast, content to lie up in an open field, can enjoy none of these little luxuries and must remain in the same position from daylight to dark.

A covert of we will say twenty acres could afford several of these open spaces, but it is all important that those of half that acreage or less should be a dense mass and almost impervious to human beings.

Blackthorn should be cut at least every seven years, cut within three inches of the ground and never laid. All dead wood to be removed and carted away. With a covert of ten acres the same principle as recommended for gorse can be carried out, that is one quarter may be cut down every second year. Someone responsible should be in charge of the men working and make it a rule that no dogs will be allowed.

In these days most heavy soils have been pipe-drained, but it should be remembered that a field thus treated, if planted with thorns or trees, will soon have the pipes choked up by roots, and will be in a worse state as far

as wet is concerned than before draining. The huntsman might curse you if he should venture his horse off the rides, but you would add considerably to the comfort of foxes if you made trenches about ten yards apart to carry off the water. The sides of trenches should be sloped, or otherwise they will soon fall in and be useless. All these small details add considerably to the expense of making a covert, but like everything else if a job has to be done it should be done properly in the first instance, and foxes are always ready to appreciate a dry lair.

A fox may frequently be found in a swamp and people think for that reason he likes a damp bed, but such is not the case, and if the inquirer would take the trouble to look, he would discover the kennel was a bunch of rushes which afforded perfectly dry lying.

The reason why swamps and other places surrounded by water are selected is that they are usually free from disturbance and the approach of man or dog is easily detected.

The whitethorn grows well and throws out many fresh shoots when cut down, but does not produce suckers from the roots like blackthorn. By itself white-thorn is undesirable as in the winter you can see from one end of a covert to the other. When, however, planted alternately with privet, the combination makes an almost impenetrable thicket after once being cut. The thorn appears to hold up the privet and as the latter retains its leaf in the winter, there is ample screen from too curious eyes. When thorn and privet reach to a height of about four feet they can be cut and laid, but this is a very unfair procedure on hounds, as it is almost impossible for them to get beneath the thorn layers, and it often means

foxes cannot be dislodged until after considerable delay. In the case of a small enclosure of three acres or less it is permissible, as the mere presence of hounds at such close quarters will frighten the tenants into leaving. Privet, however, by itself may be laid, and where the plants are far apart they can be bent over, a cut made in the ground, the bend pegged down and the soil replaced. These bends when attached to the parent stem quickly throw out roots and become independent. This again is a system not advisable in a large covert.

In layering privet it should, like thorn, be cut close to the ground, but great care must be exercised with the former and the cut must not be deep or it will break off. I have noticed occasionally white thorn cut two or three feet from the ground with the idea of leaving temporary covert. This is a great mistake for although the covert may be not quite as bare for the first year, it will ever after be getting worse. Everything should be cut as close to the ground as possible, when the roots will be strengthened and the main stovins throw out fresh growth.

Referring again to privet this plant will be found very useful in plantations that are intended to hold foxes. If planted at the same time as larch and other forest trees it will attain a vigorous growth before becoming overshadowed, and will then flourish as well in the shade as it would in the open. When privet has been laid and subsequently attained great strength, I have known foxes lie on the top whilst hounds sought them vainly underneath.

The blackberry brier is also a very useful adjunct to a covert, and is another favourite with foxes that will thrive in the shade. I suppose like all climbing and

clinging plants it is apt to retard the growth of anything it can smother, but neither blackthorn nor whitethorn of a certain height appear to be affected by it, and it may therefore be included in the list. Woods which are entirely devoid of any undergrowth can be provided with good lying for foxes by planting blackberry. If the wood is of considerable age and the tree roots of many years have sucked up the soil's fertility, it is a good plan to put a spade full of fresh earth mixed with manure at each root when planting. This adds to the cost, of course, but would aid materially the blackberry growth. All briars seem to respond to the application of manure. Having never seen blackberry planted under beech I am a little doubtful if they would grow, as the surface roots of these trees appear to sap all virtue from the soil, but if it was desired to encourage foxes in a beech wood, it would be worth planting a small section as an experiment, with two spadefuls of manured soil instead of one.

Woods of any size which are cut down periodically afford good lying in the young growth of the underwood, but when it is desired to hold foxes, blackberry may be planted and rough grass sown as soon as the timber has been cleared away. The briars will then become established before the stools have had time to throw out fresh shoots, and an excellent covert will be the result.

On suitable soils, usually of a peaty nature, the rhododendron makes good shelter for foxes, and is at the same time very ornamental, but it is unsatisfactory in the neighbourhood of wandering curs as they can roam at will amongst the bushes without being scratched.

A swampy bit of land that is useless for agricultural purposes may be easily turned into a first class covert with very little expense. The first and heaviest outlay is the trenching, but that is an absolute necessity. The initial work should be the main dyke, into which all the trenches should empty. Each bed should be between two and three yards wide with the intervening trenches not less than eighteen inches deep, and cut with a good slope. All that has to be done then is to take cuttings from one or two year old osier shoots about sixteen inches long and thrust them two-thirds of their length into the ground. A six foot bed will take two rows, and a ten foot bed three rows. In an osier-bed destined for a fox covert, the plants may be three feet both between and in the rows, although half that distance is usually recommended when the osiers are grown for market. In three years this will be a good covert, after which the osiers should be cut or laid. There are several varieties of osier, but the dwarf kind as used for basket making is best for the purpose. If the trenching has been successful in rendering the bed moderately dry, blackberry briars may be planted between the osiers in the second year. In a well managed osier bed, the produce of which is cut and sold annually, the beds are kept religiously clean and free from other plants, but as a fox covert it is an advantage to retard the growth in order to avoid cutting too frequently. The trenches may want clearing out occasionally, but otherwise an osier-bed requires little attention. Willow may be planted round the outside for shelter, but the heads of stakes should not be more than a foot above ground and the shoots growing therefrom should be topped when sufficiently high to break the wind.

Any covert that is not naturally sheltered from the wind should have trees planted on every side except the south, and the best for the purpose are Austrian pines.

Some years ago "stick" coverts were popular and their only recommendation was that one made in the spring would hold a fox the following winter. Thorns cut from fences or anywhere they could be procured were stuck firmly into the ground and the natural grasses allowed to grow up between. If it was a grass field the herbage growing there was given free rein, but if arable the field would be harrowed and sown with the coarse grasses mixed with oats before putting in the thorns. With a whole summer to run riot, no stock to eat it down and the thorns to support the bents, a field was in a few months transformed into a covert. There are coverts existent now that owe their origin to a "stick" beginning, but in most instances it will be found they were more or less bare for a period after the first two years. Dead wood seems to have a choking effect on the growth of the living, and until the sticks had well rotted away there would be no satisfactory covert.

Hounds must be continuously getting punctured by thorns, but the living bush is usually kind enough to withdraw its prick. The dead thorn, however, punctures and then breaks off, causing a nasty and painful wound that usually festers. Asking hounds to draw a stick covert is sheer cruelty.

Although I have neither tried it myself nor seen it tried, it has always seemed to me that when a covert is wanted to hold the first season, much might be done by planting a portion with artichokes (Jerusalem) and if not set too close together they would not stop

the growth of thorns or whatever was ultimately destined to be the mainstay. Artichokes grow very quickly and the stalks will usually remain standing all winter. Broom, also, is quick growing and makes good covert for three or four years, but speedily becomes lanky, and I, personally, would never recommend it.

In speaking of a desirable site for a covert I mentioned the advantage of one with a small stream running through it, but if the spot selected is not thus favoured, a pond is easily made that will hold water all summer. The making of a pond is simple enough in a clay soil, but it is another matter on light sandy land. Bear in mind that foxes must have water and if you want them to occupy your covert you must provide a supply close at hand.

In a woodland country foxes have so many places to choose from that it is unnecessary to make special homes for them, and the management of the woods is under the estate agent or his forester.

An owner, having spared neither expense nor trouble in building a small covert in a grass country, and is fortunate enough to have a litter, must feel rather annoyed at seeing the cubs held up and a brace or more killed inside. He knows quite well the bloodstain means either the covert will be blank for the earlier part of the season or will only hold a moderate fox. In speaking of small coverts I refer to those of five acres or less.

The huntsman wants to blood the young entry and at the same time teach them to work for that end by facing thorns or thick undergrowth ; whilst the master knows that for future sport he must reduce litters to a reasonable size. Every M.F.H. must be allowed to conduct his cub-hunting operations according to the methods

he thinks best, without interference or advice, but the majority like to study the wishes of covert owners, when the latter are only anxious to produce foxes that will give good runs.

The education of hounds in working thick covert, must, of course, not be neglected, but in the endeavour to attain that object it is sometimes forgotten the equally important lesson foxes have to be taught. This is to seek safety in flight by immediately facing the open. You may call it reason or what you like, but a fox is quite capable of putting two and two together, so that when he finds he can escape hounds after being turned back into covert, he will be likely to consider himself safer there than in the open. Those that are killed are, unfortunately, unable to benefit by their experience.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

THE END OF THE SEASON.

THE last day of April marks the close of a fox-hunting year, when changes in masterships and in the staffs of establishments take effect. It is an important date to professional huntsmen, for although it is customary, when their services are no longer required, to give them notice in January, they cannot feel quite safe in their positions until May. Masters are seldom guilty of the lapse of giving up their posts at the eleventh hour, but unforeseen circumstances may arise to compel their retirement, and then all the hunt servants automatically get notice. The preceding two months, March and April, are probably the busiest of the year in a kennel. Before hunting is over, whelps will be arriving and the young hounds will be coming in from walk. The latter should be promptly dosed for worms directly they come in, so that when distemper appears, they will be better able to withstand it. They must also be broken to couples, and the hound that has never had a collar

on in his life will fight determinedly against the unwonted restraint. The best plan at first is to chain them to fixed posts, and allow them their preliminary struggles against something they cannot shift. The practice of coupling up two young hounds together that have never before felt a collar is unkind, and, should one be of a nervous disposition, may do great harm.

The sooner the young hounds are taught to go in couples and taken out to exercise, the better. In many kennels that hunt four days or more a week, the huntsman has little time to attend to the entry, and, unless the master provides extra help, all the exercise they get is a few minutes' run in a grass yard. The cost of the extra help would be well repaid in general health and spirits. It is very trying for a young hound that has been allowed to roam where he pleased, and very likely petted, to be suddenly confined in a kennel with a lot of strange companions. The better the walk has been and the greater the kindness of his temporary master, the more likely is the puppy to pine for his former freedom. In this way many of the most promising specimens have their vitality sapped in vain longings for the life at walk, and when distemper comes the spirit to fight against it is weakened. If the master found three extra men, and they walked the young hounds out for four hours daily until the season was over and the regular staff could look after them, there would be a much smaller death rate. Taking all the packs of foxhounds in England together, I imagine on an average only about half the young hounds survive the first three months in kennel. Distemper and the numerous complications that follow in its wake is, of course, chiefly

responsible for this mortality. The Distemper Research will, we all hope, find some remedy that will minimize the effects of the disease, if it does not banish it altogether, but until that moment arrives we should take all available precautions to maintain the health and spirits of the young hounds. Until the moment when the dread complaint appears, I firmly believe that plenty of fresh air and exercise are of the very greatest importance, but no exercise should be given a convalescent for at least a fortnight after recovery. The frequency with which the disease appears in a gastritis or typhoid form makes keeping the stomach in a healthy condition an essential point to be remembered, and this cannot be done if it is full of worms. When ulceration appears, as it does more often than not after the stomach is attacked, any food of a hard nature may cause death, and it is always the best plan to make a rule that hounds with distemper, or for a week after convalescence, should be given only soft food. I once lost a very good hound that was well on the way to recovery by giving him some scraps of fat that happened to contain small pieces of bone. His appetite had returned, and he fed greedily, but he was dead the next day. Although I should hesitate intentionally to introduce distemper into the kennel, a summer that passes without an epidemic amongst the young hounds always leaves me wondering and fearing for the future. An outbreak in the hunting season is a very serious matter, and a hound that has never had the complaint is liable to contract it at any moment. The fact of a hound having had the disease does not render him immune from a further bout, but it has been my experience that the first inoculation leaves something

which enables the system to throw off a second attack, and it seldom proves fatal.

From what has already been discovered, I gather that distemper itself is a fever that lowers the vitality and leaves the victim a prey to any virulent microbe that may be wandering about. It is, therefore, important to keep kennels scrupulously clean by a free use of disinfectants : the burning of straw and excreta from infected hounds, in addition to using every precaution to limit the powers of dangerous germs. My own opinion, gained from several years' experience, but not necessarily of any value, is that hounds re-infect themselves, and consequently fumigation must assist in arresting the further development of the disease. The very ancient custom of putting Stockholm tar on the nose may not be a remedy, but it undoubtedly helps in destroying germs, for the nose is always the channel that conveys infection to the dog. Here is a theory that is worth consideration : hounds are admittedly more susceptible to distemper than other dogs—is it not possible that the extra sensitiveness of the former's olfactory organs may be the reason?

The practice is dying out of giving the pack an annual spring dressing ; like spring cleaning, it ought not to be necessary if a custom of daily cleanliness is observed, and hounds that are regularly brushed may perhaps not require it. However, a stranger from another kennel or puppies returning from walk are likely enough to bring colonies of parasites that will quickly breed and spread. Ticks and fleas are fairly easy to dispose of, but the almost invisible lice are very difficult to eradicate, a frequent cause of skin disease, and killed only by a dressing from head to

stern. It is a messy, dirty and tedious job to dress thoroughly a pack of hounds, but it is worth the trouble, for, although the pack may look unsightly for a time, it will be all the better for it later on.

The mating of bitches will have been a problem that has occupied the huntsman's mind all the winter, when, if he has been wise, he will have set down the bitches he intends breeding from with the sires he decides to put them to. Otherwise, bitches will come unexpectedly in season, and he will have to make a hurried choice without giving the matter sufficient thought. The huntsman of a four-day-a-week pack has few opportunities of selecting suitable sires from outside sources by watching their work in the field, and must rely for hunting characters on what he is told. As no one likes to admit keeping a hound that is not altogether satisfactory in his work, answers to questions on that point cannot always be depended on. The result is that most huntsmen make their choice of a sire in a foreign kennel entirely on looks, trusting that if he is a second or third season hound he would not have been kept if he had any glaring fault. In breeding hounds for hunting, and not for showing, it would perhaps be safest to go to a pack noted for its looks, and pick out the ugliest specimen. In reply to the question as to why this "ugly duckling" had been kept, it would probably be found because he was the best fox catcher of the lot. It is a very laudable ambition to try and improve or at least retain the good looks of a pack, but "the proof of the pudding is in the eating," and the hound that can go fast and is fresh at the end of a long day when others are tiring cannot have much wrong with his conformation. One that has proved his speed and stamina

in the field, is possessed of "drive" and exceptional tenderness of nose, should be allowed to reproduce his good qualities, even though neither make, shape nor colour are up to the ideals we have previously conceived. The symmetry of outline and the perfect balance, which latter can only be judged in movement, are points that anyone with an eye for a hound can easily appreciate, but we are apt to allow fashion to sway our judgment over details that are immaterial to the animal's free use of limbs. This is a subject over which the last word will never be written, but there is a growing tendency lately amongst masters and huntsmen to put field qualities before the attractions that please on the "flags." For thirty years previous to the war, exceptional hunting qualities had been rather neglected in the desire to attain the stamp that Peterborough had pronounced correct. The idea was that if a hound's breeding was all right, he was as likely to reproduce his far-off ancestors' good qualities as one that had inherited them. The fallacy of the argument has been proved by results, and in the wail of huntsmen about want of scent, which, in other words, means want of scenting powers in the hounds.

There is not space here to pursue the matter further, and I will propose to discuss the arrival of whelps. Of course, it is not possible to arrange so that births should come at the exact time required, and the greatest authorities are not in agreement as to the best month for the pups to be dropped. The majority appear to think that the first week in January is not too early, but, personally, I consider March quite soon enough. For the first three or four weeks before the mother's milk begins to go off, and with warm

quarters, it does not matter much what the weather is like, but after that time puppies require warmth and sunshine to thrive properly. I should put March, April and May as the three best months in the year for the birth of whelps, and add June as a second best.

The very early pups, should they survive a cold spring, and go out to walk, will be much more likely to get into mischief than later ones. Huntsmen may not have realised that farmers have begun to recognise poultry-keeping as an important branch of the business, and a few day-old chicken will easily be captured by a three months' pup. Later in the summer, the chickens having learnt wisdom with their feathers, will look after themselves. The ideal time for a puppy to go out to walk is the middle of May.

Let us suppose that the huntsman of a four-day-a-week pack has several bitches due to whelp at the end of February and first weeks of March. When they are safely delivered and it is decided how many each mother may be allowed to rear, they can be safely left to the care of the feeder, who will see they get plenty to eat. If the mother has an abundant supply of milk, the youngsters will thrive and grow, but it is wisest to teach them to drink milk as soon as possible after they are three weeks old, so that they will not feel the pinch when their own wants are greater and their mother's flow is less. Time and patience must be expended on the process, each pup in turn being introduced to the substitute for his natural food. When there are several litters, the feeder, or whoever is in charge of them, should be given a boy to assist; that is, if a boy can be found who is keen and fond of animals. If there are a dozen litters, the cleaning of each separate kennel, giving fresh bedding and feeding

the pups, will occupy a youth's whole day. When once the pups have learnt to drink, they should be fed three times a day, and, of course, the boy must remain with them until they have finished, as the bitch would otherwise lap it up. This is not very arduous work, but it takes time, and the feeder with other jobs can seldom spare the necessary attention.

I recommend some fresh raw meat cut up fine for weakly pups, but here again each pup should be given his share separately, or otherwise the strongest will get it all.

Cleanliness, care and attention are essential in bringing the whelps to vigorous good health at the moment they are sent out to walk. Neglect of these seemingly minor details is a waste of good material, and it is not worth breeding from valuable bitches if they are not properly looked after.

About three weeks old the whelps should have their dew-claws removed, and at six weeks the first worm pill given in the morning, followed by a second just before going out to walk. All puppies should be dosed a day or two before starting for their new homes, however clean they may appear. Equal parts of yellow sulphur and lard with a very small quantity of turpentine, applied warm and well rubbed in. It is as well to shut them away from the mother after the dressing for an hour or two, or she may lick it off at once. No one can expect their puppies to be returned in a good condition if they are sent out full of worms, and with insects on their skins. For this reason I attach the very greatest importance to the pills and the dressing. Puppies that require dosing or dressing after they have been a month or

two at walk are evidence of neglect on the part of the huntsman.

The sooner puppies are sent out to walk after they are eight weeks old the better.

When breeding is carried on extensively, it would be a great advantage if the kennel was surrounded by fields that belonged to the establishment, and, in fact, it would be all the better if there was a farm of at least a hundred acres attached. The whelps, with their mothers, should be given wooden kennels, which should be placed in the fields, and constantly moved. Each kennel to have its run fenced high enough to keep the pups from straying too far, but allowing the mother to jump out. The runs should be fenced with wood and not wire, which I consider injurious to feet. Besides the benefit to whelps of having fresh and unsoiled ground, a farm that belonged to the kennel, or that was occupied by the master, would be exceedingly useful for walking out hounds, and much early schooling of the young entry might be done there. Few sheep owners care to see their flocks chased, even when no actual damage is done, and the young hound that is never off the road cannot be expected to look on a sheep as a domestic animal when he sees it for the first time. If he were accustomed to seeing the hunt flock, and knew he was not allowed to chase them, he would be unlikely to transgress in the hunting field.

Marking the pups before they go to walk is an important detail which should not be forgotten. The old custom of marking litters by the removal of certain portions inside the ear is dying out, and tattooing has taken its place. The ear grows considerably after six weeks, and it is in consequence

better not to mark until the pups are ready to go out. If, however, there are several litters of the same age, it is advisable to mark earlier, or at least to clip a temporary mark in the hair of each, in order to distinguish them should they get mixed up. When foster-mothers are employed, and some of different litters are given, the clipping of marks should be renewed weekly, and, of course, carefully booked.

Very strict and accurate keeping of kennel books is a duty the huntsman should never delegate to a subordinate; everything should be set down at once, and nothing left to memory.

The above hints are meant to refer to hounds, fox-hounds, harriers and beagles, but they apply equally to all descriptions of dogs which are bred in large numbers.

CHAPTER TWELVE.

THE BEAGLE AND THE HARE.

THE increasing popularity attending the pursuit of the hare is merely a revival of the chase in its oldest form. The wild hare of ancient days was held in great honour, an animal that would bring out the best qualities of hounds and huntsman to pursue it to a kill. At that period the fox was held in small esteem, an outlaw to be captured by any means, and no one cared how he was "trapped or slain."

In addition to the actual sport of hunting, the delirious excitement of riding across country after hounds became appreciated, and in consequence the fox rose at once to his high estate. About the same time when much of the land was enclosed and many landlords wished to increase their head of game, the system of preservation came into vogue. This would have been well enough if not carried to excess, but in countries with a suitable soil and abundant feeding ground, hares quickly multiplied and were a nuisance to the occupier.

Up to then the wild hare had only survived from pursuit by men and dogs by the exercise of all her cunning. With the protection from her natural enemies she soon became a semi-tame animal, wandering about the fields in droves, naked and unashamed before the eye of man. Generations of inherited instincts were thus temporarily obscured, and the wild character of the animal lost.

The desire of indifferent shots to massacre wholesale and to see the results of their prowess recorded in the Press, may have led to the excessive preservation of the hare. It is difficult to understand the mentality of men with the ability to hit a haystack, finding any sport in shooting at such an easy target; and still more strange, they should care to go on continuing the slaughter. The Hares and Rabbits Bill, however, put that sport out of fashion, except in specially favoured districts, so that the hare had once more to fall back on her natural cunning to avoid extinction, and the survivors regained the wild attributes of distant forbears.

In countries where preservation was almost unknown, the hare not having been pampered or allowed unnatural ease, retained all those inherited qualities which enabled her ancestors in bye-gone days to defeat the craft of hounds and huntsman.

The fox has many and various tricks up his sleeve, but they are nothing compared to the numerous artifices of the hare. Truly she is a beast of the chase it is a pleasure to hunt, and unless out-paced at the start by too big hounds, may always be depended upon to put up a good fight.

There is a widespread idea that the hare is a very timorous animal, whereas she is really very bold, and except when weak, or wounded, is well able to take

care of herself. No fox will ever attack a healthy hare, and if attempting it once will not be likely to try a second time. What has led to the hare being considered timid is her very highly strung nervous system, which is controlled by an exceptionally acute sense of hearing and smelling.

Those who have witnessed fights between jack hares in the spring of the year can testify to their pugnacity, and it is by no means uncommon to pick up carcasses of the vanquished after a battle.

Although it is impossible to enter into the exact feelings of a hunted hare, my own opinion is that up to almost the last moment she always expects to escape by her natural cunning.

When fox-hunting is impossible and the inhabitants of the district want to ride, harriers afford a pleasant make-shift, but in order to see the finer shades of *venerie*, a hare should be hunted with small hounds, and the followers, including the huntsman, should all be afoot.

A pack of beagles, preferably under fifteen inches, will give those who follow good exercise and the best of sport. Exercise of some kind is essential to health, and hunting is the form prescribed by nature. Whatever recreation we indulge in should be sufficiently engrossing to absorb our whole interest and attention. Otherwise the muscles may automatically be put in play, but unless they are working in conjunction with the brain, neither will derive the full benefit. The business or professional man devoting his whole time to a sedentary occupation is liable to a nervous breakdown by over-taxing the mind and neglecting the body, so that any sport or pastime he takes up should be of a character to relieve all mental strain, and allow him temporarily to forget life's worries.

When pursued by hounds it is the habit of the hare usually to run in circles, so that the man in advancing years is able to see most of the fun without having to quicken his pace beyond a walk. In fact, following beagles is a sport that can be enjoyed equally well by the fleet steps of youth or the halting paces of "three-score-and-ten." In pre-war days it was possible for the business or professional man to get one or two days a week with foxhounds at a modest cost, but now that expenses—hay, corn and labour—are more than double, the sport is an inadequate return for the outlay. These men have not lost their love of hunting, and wanting a healthy recreation for their few spare hours, find all they require with beagles.

The upkeep of a pack of these small hounds is of course, nothing in comparison to that of foxhounds, and a small subscription will assist the Master with kennel expenses.

This article does not attempt an explanation of the difficulties of starting a pack in a country not hitherto hunted by beagles, but as *Game and Gun* appeals very largely to shooting men it will not be out of place to give a few hints to would-be Masters on establishing amicable relations.

Landowners and occupiers are, of course, the first people to be consulted, but apart from these, there are in many districts shooting tenants whose wishes have to be considered. Now we may take it for granted that the majority of shooting men are good sportsmen, and do not desire to interfere unnecessarily with the sport of hunting, but they very naturally object to a shoot which has cost them considerable expense, being spoilt by hounds. The Master of a pack must, therefore arrange his meets so that he will not be likely to annoy

the shooting tenant or disturb ground which is likely to be wanted at an early date. If a shooting tenant and his keeper have no previous experience of beagles they will find that these little hounds, except on the actual day, have no disturbing effect on game. Both partridges and pheasants are quick to appreciate the fact that hounds mean no guns and they have consequently nothing to fear. A covey mayhap fly to an adjoining field, or pheasants disturbed from a noonday nap flee to another covert, but they return at once when hounds have gone. It is the business of the Master to establish friendly terms not only with those on whose lands he expects to find a hare, but also with those of the surrounding district which hounds are likely to invade. Asking permission first is always a better plan than apologising after a complaint.

The foregoing suggestions are matters appertaining to the duties of a Master and hunt officials, but the ordinary follower would materially assist by doing as little damage as possible, taking particular care not to break fences, shutting gates and avoiding trampling crops in market gardens. By paying attention to these small details much unnecessary friction can be eliminated and a day's hunting enjoyed in peace.

The man with no previous experience of hunting may in his first days with hounds transgress certain rules which to him are unknown. The most important of these is to stand perfectly still at a check, and to be as quiet as possible.

The neophyte on seeing hounds start off with a burst of music when close to their hare, is apt to think that scent is a stable quality remaining for some time where left, and does not realise it's volatile character or how easily it is affected by other extraneous smells. The

individual may have grasped the fact that horses, cattle, sheep and manure-stained ground have a baleful influence on scent, but he usually fails to realise the strength of his own smell or its power in effacing the hare's faint perfume.

If our detectives could cultivate the scenting abilities of hounds they would find it a much surer method of running criminals to ground than the finger print system, for everyone has a distinctive smell of his or her own. Hounds are familiar with their huntsman's smell and consequently it does not bother them so much as would a stranger's. For this reason, it is important for followers to give the huntsman plenty of room and not walk after him whilst he is making a cast. Common sense will tell you that if your scent is stronger than a hare's it must do harm to walk over the line.

The fast runner should remember never to run exactly in the wake of hounds, but a little to one side or the other, keeping a sharp look-out on the leaders of the pack and stopping instantly on the slightest sign of hesitation. Hares turn very short and when least expected, so that if not exercising great care, those a little too forward may find themselves over the line, and prevent a quick recovery.

For young men who are exceptionally fast and are in hard condition, it is possible to keep fairly close to a pack during a run from start to finish. The situation is, however, quite different for one who has left his school-days some years behind, and whose muscles have lost the resiliency of youth. He may realise that increasing weight and impaired digestion, with an accompanying advance to premature old age, are due more or less to want of exercise, and being fond of sport, decides to join a pack of beagles for a hunt once or twice a week.

This is a type of man who should proceed with caution. If he happened to be athletic in his boyhood and is fond of hunting, so that the cry of hounds is likely to inspire him to great exertion, he will be tempted to overdo it, and, possibly, lay up for himself heart trouble in the future. The desire to be with the pack must be curbed, and the pace at the start limited, when they find themselves unable to compete with men who have been following beagles regularly and are in hard condition.

Quite apart from the running and the exercise the principal interest in beagling is watching hounds hunt, puzzling out a faint line, or solving some intricate manœuvre of the hare. Although not absolutely necessary, it adds considerably to the pleasure of this if the different hounds are known and can be recognised at work.

In the endeavour to keep on terms during a fast burst it is well nigh impossible for even the swiftest runner to go the pace, and at the same time watch what each hound is doing, so that the ordinary individual will exhaust himself in making the attempt, whereas by adopting a steady gait at this preliminary period the slowest have almost an equal chance of seeing the hunt and witnessing the closing scenes. In order to appreciate a hunt in all its many phases, it is necessary to give your entire sympathy to hounds, or otherwise you will be liable to feel sorry for a tired hare. As the old proverb sayeth: "You cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds." By identifying yourself with the aims and objects of the pack you will become keener on every succeeding day you go out and the final triumph will be as much yours as the huntsman's.

Hare-hunting hounds vary in height from twelve to sixteen inches, but the happy medium of fourteen

inches is a size big enough for any pack to be followed on foot if it is only good enough. A country that is chiefly plough or one that is intersected by deep drains, naturally require bigger and stronger hounds than where pasture predominates.

Hounds must be sufficiently big and stout when in condition to tire a hare, but as far as pleasure in following goes the smaller they are the better, provided they can only accomplish a kill at least in every third attempt. The pack "in blood," one that has been killing pretty regularly, will require little assistance from the huntsman, but small hounds that have been deprived through ill-luck or other causes from catching their hares for several successive days, must be encouraged and assisted in the closing stages of a run. The man who hunts them will then have to use all his hunting skill and be prepared to run hard if the desired end is to be attained. Hounds at this stage may be just as keen and hunt as well as at the beginning, but they fail in pushing on with the eager keenness which is characteristic of a consistently successful pack on a tired hare. The hounds that have not killed with average regularity, welcome the scent of a fresh hare, and are, therefore, more liable to change.

How often has the hare-hunter been foiled by a change at the last moment! Where hares are numerous it is always liable to occur, but even when they are thinly scattered the hunted one, when getting tired will seek the form of a friend, pushing out the tenant and taking her place. The result is that hounds carry on with the fresh hare, often treading on their original quarry in passing, and the huntsman discovers when too late that the animal he is running is still comparatively fresh. This is a very heart-breaking incident, but it cannot be

helped, and must be endured with stoicism as one of the many difficulties which Diana lays on the shoulders of all true worshippers at her shrine. If a hunt was invariably successful the sport would lose more than half its charm, and it is the uncertainty that hangs round all pertaining to the chase which is one of its greatest attributes. The greater the uncertainty the greater the satisfaction at a successful issue.

For this reason alone it is an advantage to have small hounds. A pack of sixteen inches with good noses, and built on the right lines, should account for nearly every hare found, when the assurance of almost certain success is in danger of satiating the appetite.

With a hare barely out of sight and on a moderate scenting day, any hound worthy of the name ought to be able to go its best pace, so that if its speed approaches closely to the hunted animals, the latter has no chance of forging ahead. A hunt under these conditions is little better than a coursing match.

The use of big hounds for hare-hunting brings in the danger of keeping those with only indifferent working qualities as except on a road the highly sensitive nose and ability to puzzle out a cold line are seldom required. The huntsman handling a pack of large size is inclined to seek for a fresh hare when the one he has been hunting gets far ahead and the line becomes stale, so that hounds quickly lose the virtues of patience and perseverance.

Different Masters have different rules, and some do not like anyone except the official whipper-in, to carry a whip. There are, however, others who ask certain members of their field to carry a whip, particularly if they are runners of average merit. It may be, perhaps, only once or twice in a season they may have

occasion to use the whip, but it might be of inestimable value at a critical moment. To turn or stop hounds without the aid of a whip is a difficult matter. When the regular whippers-in are present the ordinary follower can leave them to perform their duties, but it can easily happen they should be absent, when a fresh hare getting up, or danger from rabbit-rioting, requires prompt action.

The cracking of whips seems to have a peculiar fascination for some people, but, however, harmless an amusement it may be at other times, it is a regrettable practice in the hunting field. Shy or sensitive hounds are often stopped from hunting by the sound, and it should only be used by officials as a warning to offenders of what to expect if they continue to err.

Beagles, and particularly the young entry, are difficult to restrain from rabbits and one getting up in front of them is a temptation they are often unable to resist. The only way to stop or turn hounds is to get in front of them, but to rate them from behind is an altogether futile proceeding. If a rabbit or fresh hare should get up, the man who intends to act, should without a second's hesitation place himself in the line before it is too late. His presence there will be sufficient in the case of a rabbit, and if it is a fresh hare, the momentary stoppage will enable the huntsman to get them back in the original line. These hints are meant for those of the field whom the Master has asked to carry a whip and who desire to assist without officious interference with the duties of the whipper-in.

Trains, motor cars or bicycles may all be utilised in getting to the meet, if it is too far distant for walking, but in that case it is always advisable to take a change of shoes and stockings. The choice of clothes must be

left to the individual, but it is not wise to be too thinly clad as there must always be numerous intervals of standing about at checks. Shoes are, perhaps, the most important item and the lighter the better for running. My advice has always been to adopt the light gymnasium shoe with a rubber sole. A slab of chocolate in the pocket to stave off the pangs of hunger and a man is fully prepared to remain with hounds until they return to kennel.

There have always been a goodly number of women following beagles, even in the days when fashion made them wear skirts to the ankle, but now with the abbreviated garment the weaker sex can compete successfully with men. We have consequently every reason to suppose that beagling will become more popular every day with women. The fresh air and exercise will add considerably to the health of those who without the incentive of hounds would spend their time indoors.

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